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"Touch me not."

Page 22

THE WEIRD ORIENT

Nine Mystic Tales

BY

HENRY ILIOWIZI

Author of "In the Pale," "Jewish Dreams and Realities," etc.

PHILADELPHIA

HENRY T. COATES AND COMPANY

1900

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PUBLISHERS' PREFACE.

IN introducing to the general public a writer who has heretofore been known chiefly among the people of his own race, his publishers may perhaps be permitted to say a word. Rabbi Iliowizi is a Hebrew of pure lineage, the son of a zealous member of the Chassidim, a Kabbalistic sect numbering over half a million members in Russia, Roumania and Gallicia, but rarely met with in this country. He passed his infancy and boyhood in the Russian provinces of Minsk and Moghileff, and in Roumania, growing to manhood and receiving his education at Frankfort-on-the-Main, Berlin and Breslau, where he qualified himself for a theological career. After six years of study in Germany, he spent some four years more perfecting his training in modern languages and in Arabic and Hebrew in London and Paris, under the auspices of the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Alliance Israelite Universelle, as a preparation to take charge of one of the outlying mission stations maintained by these affiliated societies in the Orient, where they support some fifty schools for the benefit of their oppressed co-religionists. After a prolonged service in Morocco, engaged

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in the educational work of the two societies, Mr. Iliowizi lived for a year at Gibraltar, and then came to America to devote himself to the ministry of the Jewish Church, and is now the spiritual head of a large congregation of his own people.

Mr. Iliowizi has hitherto contributed principally to the literature of his race, being known among Jews by several works; most widely, perhaps, by a volume of stories of Russian life, under the title of "In the Pale," recently published by the Jewish Publication Society of America for its subscribers. In the series of Eastern tales, comprising the present book, which appeals to a larger audience, he has the special advantage, not only of a lengthened residence among Eastern peoples, but that he is himself of an Oriental race, of a heredity highly tinctured by the tenets of one of its most mystical sects, and personally is of a strongly Semitic type of mind, tempered by the maturing of his powers in the clear atmosphere of the New World intellectual life. He has, therefore,—or ought to have,—exceptional facilities for interpreting to the West the mind and heart of the East.

Whoever has lived long in the Orient,—and Morocco is essentially Eastern in its atmosphere, even if geographically it might possibly be otherwise classed,—cannot but realize the subtle and inexpressible influence that so strongly pervades its life, and which, often as it has been spoken of, is so hard for the Occidental mind fully to understand or appreciate. It is the "call of the East," as Mr.

Kipling happily puts it, and of which his British soldier sings in such realistic fashion :

"An' I'm learnin' 'ere in London what the ten-year sodger tells;
'If you've 'eard the East a-callin', why you won't 'eed nothin' else.'
No! you won't 'eed nothin' else
But them spicy garlic smells
An' the sunshine an' the palm trees an' the tinkly temple-bells!"

The mystery of the great desolate desert stretches, with their overpowering solemnity of deadly silence, has from time immemorial exercised a most powerful influence upon the imagination of those who frequent them; and their optical illusions are often so curious and so startling as to afford easy explanation of the legends of hidden and phantom cities, such as are told here and elsewhere, and indeed of much else beside. Stories similar to "Sheddad's Palace of Irem," and that of the vanishing city of the Peri in "The Crœsus of Yemen," are frequently met with.

The gloominess of the mountain regions, especially that of the Sinaitic Peninsula, has also had a profound influence in giving color to the legendary lore of the middle Orient; and this combination of desert and mountain influences perhaps largely accounts for what is distinctively peculiar in the mysticism of the East, and for much that will be found in this book.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. THE DOOM OF AL ZAMERI, . . .	17
II. SHEDDAD'S PALACE OF IREM, . .	53
III. THE MYSTERY OF THE DAMAVANT, .	89
IV. THE GODS IN EXILE, ...	119
V. KING SOLOMON AND ASHMODAI, . .	161
VI. THE CROESUS OF YEMEN, . . .	199
VII. THE FATE OF ARZEMIA, ...	253
VIII. THE STUDENT OF TIMBUCTU, . .	287
IX. A NIGHT BY THE DEAD SEA, . . .	327

ILLUSTRATIONS

By WILLIAM SHERMAN POTTS.

PAGE

I. *"Touch me not!"* (page 22) Frontispiece

II. *"Determined to penetrate into the seemingly impenetrable wonderland of the Damavant."* 92

III. *"Like a thunderbolt striking to the centre of a hurricane, the demon shot down."* 173

IV. *"There sprung, like Iris from the clouds, a smiling Hebe."* 323

THE WEIRD ORIENT.

THE WEIRD ORIENT.

THE nine tales which follow have a history which is itself not without interest. The materials have been accumulated during a residence of many years at Tetuan, Morocco, varied by excursions to places in the interior where semi-barbarous life may be seen in its pristine crudeness. In Tetuan I had somewhat exceptional opportunities of getting into the heart of native life and thought, and I am under obligations also for contributions received from a venerable story-teller at Tangier, who had been assistant librarian at the *Kairouin* of Fez, the only university of the Moorish Empire. The tales themselves have been for centuries floating

through the legendary lore which plays so large a part in the intellectual cloudland of the gorgeous East; my part has been to put them into English dress, with scrupulous adherence to their substance and, as far as may be, to their native costume.

Tetuan is a typical Oriental town, beautiful from a distance, disappointing at a closer inspection, but not devoid of that classic atmosphere which invests ancient cities in the East with a spiritual something unfelt in modern centres of culture. Situated at the foot of the Beni Hosmar, a bold peak of the northern branch of the Atlas range, it has a population of about twenty thousand souls, is enclosed by a dilapidated wall, boasts of some fine homes built by wealthy Tetuani, has a separate *mellah* for its unfavored Jews, some European dwellings and cultivated gardens for foreign consuls, a large unclean square as a market-place, chronically infested by packs of mongrel dogs fed by Moslem women, and something of an official residence within the moss-capped walls of a stronghold spoken of as the *Casbah*. The rest is covered by the Moorish quarter, a

bewildering labyrinth of unpaved, unswept alleys, crooked lanes, the white, flat-roofed, unwindowed houses often meeting each other overhead, thus creating dingy tunnels which are utilized as bazaars, with wretched holes to right and left reserved for sundry wares and offices—the usual conditions of Moslem towns.

Unattractive as such a conglomeration of semi-barbarous retreats must appear, neither Pegasus nor the muses would pass them with indifference. As the descendants of the Moors expelled from Hispania by their Catholic Majesties, the Tetuani show a degree of refinement unknown elsewhere in Barbary, and with it survives a taste for higher things of which poetry is not the least. Tetuan's intellectual atmosphere is so generally recognized that the present Emir-al-Mumemin (sole ruler of the true faithful) sent his heir apparent, Hassan, to be educated at the *Casbah* by a *taleb* chosen from the local aristocracy, in preference to the unfathomed wisdom stored in the wise heads of the *Kairouin* at Fez. The minstrel, the fluent story-teller, the poetic historian, and the fine performer on the double-stringed

gimreh, are not unfamiliar figures in Tetuan, provided one knows how to approach them, which is not so hard as it is to overcome their reluctance to unbosom themselves before the infidel. Great as is the Moor's cupidity, it pales before his abhorrence of the foreign intruder who presumes to pry into his jealously guarded sanctuaries. Touch him on a point concerning his nebulous legends and traditions and, like the turtle, he draws in his head, and that is the last you will see of him, unless you strike the sensitive chord of national pride by speaking grandiloquently of non-Mussulman heroes and literary triumphs. Even then Moslem passiveness proves often an immovable inertia. It has been found possible to provoke the garrulity of the *taleb, adool* and *fukie*, respectively representing our lawyer, notary, and man of letters ; but there are two characters in Morocco whom no whirlwind will move to dispute the infidel's claim to a superior culture, and they are the all-knowing *kadi* and the *emin*, the judge and the priest, both deriving their unquestioned authority from al Koran, and thus cherishing a supreme

contempt for the wisdom of the faithless inspired by the cunning devil. The idea is as old as Islam that what the Koran reveals not, Allah alone knows.

After many rueful failures to get at the sources of Barbary's folklore, the author of this book conceived the idea, which happily met with some success, of creating a social focus sufficiently attractive to ensnare unwary stragglers of infallible Islamism, such as itinerant students, beggars, story-tellers and pilgrims, who, being strangers in the place, might be induced by liberal treatment and a little policy to impart some glimpses of the precious lore so dear to one who had set his heart on the acquisition of so promising a treasure. Did the *Arabian Nights* and the other works we know exhaust the vast resources of the Orient's mysteries? Without betraying his ultimate purpose, the author called a meeting of the foreign residents, all good friends or acquaintances, and submitted the scheme of opening a Casino for mutual sociability and the reception of worthy strangers, sometimes of high rank, who not infrequently

cross the Strait of Gibraltar to see life as it must have been in the patriarchal age. The suggestion was received with acclamation; the meeting, nineteen souls in all, organized itself into a body of subscribing members; officers were elected, rules formulated, and a liberal subscription list enabled the chairman to proceed at once to carry out the project, everyone wondering why the thing had never been thought of before. It took some weeks to perfect matters, when the pleasure-house was opened with proper ceremony. The windows of the commodious building looked on the market-place, the Casino being about a hundred paces from the gate of the *Casbah*, and the institution soon became an object of talk and wonder, it being the first of its kind in the tedious annals of Tetuan.

Only a few days after the opening the members experienced the undelightful surprise of finding one of their distinguished friends, the Spanish Vice-consul, a stately hidalgo of high lineage, afflicted by the thirst of Tantalus, with a hydrophobic aversion to water as the proper means of appeasing it.

The cavalier could neither be asked to resign nor could he be expelled, without creating an unpleasant sensation, but his drunkenness threatened the very life of the resort. What was to be done? A secret meeting called for the purpose of dealing with the problem ended in a unanimous sigh of despondency. But help was near at hand. Diepo, the caterer, who realized that his prospects were on the brink of ruin, devised a way out of the dilemma. Under the pretext that the annoying pest of insects, flying and creeping, required some remedy, the shrewd caterer prepared a substance that stuck to one like the Evil One, spread it freely on large sheets of brown paper, and distributed them judiciously where they would best serve his purpose. Once in his hazy condition, the chivalrous Vice-consul was quick in satisfying Diepo's most sanguine anticipations, picking up by a variety of zigzag evolutions almost every sticker, and covering himself with the viscous stuff from head to foot, until the stifled giggle of those present gave way to roars of laughter. A coarse *jellab* had to be thrown around the

frame of the inebriate, to take him home without exposure to the ridicule of outsiders. If the incident did not cure the disgraced representative of Spanish chivalry of his thirst, it at least rendered it impossible for him to return to the circle he had scandalized; and as to Diepo's stratagem, it was commended as a measure devised for self-preservation.

An unexpected triumph for the Casino was the application of three prominent Moslems for membership, each one, in days bygone, having been attached to some embassy the Caliph of the Lord now and then sends to one or another of the European courts. To the manifold diversions afforded by the institution belonged a sagacious parrot who astonished the noble Moors by receiving them with the *Muezzin's* cry: "*La illaha, il Allah, Mohammed Ressul Allah!*" This confession of Islam, that there is no God but God, and that Mohammed is His Prophet, would have edified the Mussulmans, had not the frivolous bird accompanied his exclamation with screams of profane laughter. At first puzzled by the unaccountable frivolity of the bird, the most

ingenuous of the Moslems finally solved the riddle by recognizing therein an expression of felicity the creature derived from uttering the sacred formula.

Gratuitous music was furnished by an Italian who blew the trombone; by a French teacher who played the violin; by a Hebrew who gave wind to a pipe of reeds; and by a Spaniard who harped on the strings of a colossal bass-viol. In course of a few months the members of the Casino entertained visitors not alone from Europe and many quarters of Barbary, but from the more distant Orient, the most of them coming by the way of Tangier, sometimes called the "white city of the dark continent." But nothing advertised and dignified that institution more than the standing offer of twenty-five pesetas to him who should, upon a fixed evening, regale its members with the most interesting tale, subject to the critical verdict of three judges, the decision to be sustained or rejected by a majority of votes. The tale was not to be wholly fictitious, but should either turn around some historic event, or be based on some popular tradition or legend

current in the lands of the rising sun. In a country where, thanks to nature's bounty, a peseta is sufficient to supply a numerous family with food for days, the prize held out as an inducement proved an object of keen competition. Once a month the competitors were given the opportunity of displaying their story-telling talents, and on one occasion a *fukie* of Fez, a Jew of Yemen, another one of Jerusalem, and a Parsee of Bombay, claimed the attention of the interested auditors, in their endeavors to secure the coveted prize.

Such were the beginnings of this work; it contains in substance all the tales for which prizes were awarded, but it is only fair to state that the Parsee was the one to whom the author is mostly indebted for the mass of his material. Yakoub Malek was a very original eccentric, of a nature deep, generous, ardent and visionary. A Parsee by birth, Malek exchanged his Zoroastrian creed for Buddha's ideals, only to show a later preference for Islam. Driven by a restless temperament, he traversed Asia throughout its length and breadth, and crossed the whole north of Africa

for the avowed purpose of seeking an audience with the Pope in Rome, his object being to be initiated into the mystery of the Catholic Church. Like Marco Polo, Malek was the most observing of travellers, and his adventures embraced encounters with monstrous brutes, communion with spirits in the desert of Gobi, hairbreadth escapes from cyclonic storms, shipwrecks, venomous reptiles, cannibals and banditti. In the Western hemisphere Malek would pass for a transcendental spiritualist, claiming, as he did, to hold intercourse with the spirits of his parents, especially with that of his father. One dark evening he startled his auditors by producing a human finger, all dried and shrivelled. He had taken it off stealthily from the right hand of his father's dead body, after the vultures had denuded it of flesh, it being the religious custom of the Parsees to expose their dead to the voracity of that carrion bird, for which purpose, as is well known, their "towers of silence" are constructed. That singular rite has its origin in the Zoroastrian idea that earth is holy and must not be polluted by the decay of human

flesh.—"As often as I long to see my father, I hold this bone closed in my right hand and shut my eyes, when lo! I see him rise from the realms of the invisible, ready to commune with me in whispers audible to my soul," asserted the Oriental with a mystic glow in his eye.

His æsthetic quality betrayed itself in his glowing descriptions of Balbec and Tadmor, of the prodigious monuments of Egypt, and the temples and palaces of India. Of his vivid power to portray what his memory retained, or his imagination conceived, the subjoined rhapsody, taken as he gave it, may convey an idea. "I see him there, Shah Jahán, in Jáhnáhád, the Delhi of his fiat, exalted on his throne of thrones, a blaze of jewelled splendors, set in mockery of the peacock's feathers, but fairer than that fairest bird, the Moghul's emblem of star-dotted majesty. Great Akbar's Empire is his, and India's wealth.—Poor Moghul! From Agra's lovelier court, thy favored home, the courier speeds to drown thy happiness in gloom. She is no more who owned thy heart. Thy sweetest

Empress, Mumtaza Mahal, the Orient's loveliness and grace, succumbed to throes which mothers know. The babe survived her. Delhi mourns. Shah Jahán hurries to his seat of woe. How dismal looks the city of imperial gardens! How sepulchral its palace of grandeurs nowhere seen, never heard of, vast and noble, too grand for man, not unfit for gods!—Death darkens the world, darkens Shah Jahán's glorious throne-hall. Here his incomparable mate lies cold in death, crowned and sceptred, as though called to rule in the nether world, a queen among the dead. All mourn and weep, but the true sorrow is thine, poor Jahán, with melancholy as thy only friend, thy hope the grave. That wondrous sepulchre of thine, reared to crown thy love; there it stands, thy resting-place and hers, the *Taj*, the monumental blossom of the world, beyond expression beautiful."

Yakoub Malek was a mystic adventurer, and his narrative mystified his audience. But for that delightful dreamer this book would never have seen light. His passing out of sight, with an echo that rings in the ear for-

ever, charmed by a voice that enchanted the soul, suggests the career of those prophetic wizards who, having stirred the world with the fire of their breath, departed this life, leaving song and prophecy to vibrate in the air to the end of time. Should that picturesque wanderer ever come across these pages, he will have to forgive the liberties the author has taken with his rhapsodic style not less than with the version in certain parts of his narrative. Not everything the dreamy Orient is ready to accept will meet with equal credence, or even with tolerance, in the sobered Occident. Yet enough has been retained in these tales to draw the reader from his realistic surroundings into those weird realms where, unrestrained by the laws of sublunar existence and the limitations of mortality, the spirit is allowed to roam in the vast, unencumbered by matter, unhindered by time and space.

HENRY ILIOWIZI.

PHILADELPHIA, APRIL, 1900.

THE DOOM OF AL ZAMERI.

THE DOOM OF AL ZAMERI.

NOTHING is known in nature which, in awful impressiveness, compares with the overpowering scenery forever associated with God's revelation to man. That arm of the Indian Ocean called the Red Sea bifurcates into the westerly gulf of Suez and the easterly one of Akabah, and the triangular peninsula thus formed embraces the region that bears the name of the sky-consecrated Mount Sinai. He who, from an overtopping height, once surveys those prodigies of this globe's eternal framework, pile on pile, varied by solitary peaks raising their heads above the clouds, amidst a confusion of innumerable gorges, *wadys* and ravines, the red of the stupendous mass interspersed with porphyry

and greenstone, will, apart from their spiritual reminiscences, bear the impression to the end of his days that he has been in the very heart of creative omnipotence. About the entire system there is such a ghostly air, such a terrific frown, as is recalled by no other chain of crests and cliffs, however bold or life-deserted. If the bleaker rocks that encompass the basin of the Dead Sea are more deterring, those of Horeb are of a thrilling sublimity; and if this is true in broad daylight, night invests them with an inexpressible mystic awe, intensified by an inexplicable rumbling and roaring not unlike distant thunder. But all other feelings are merged in the one of terror when, as it sometimes happens, a heavy thunderstorm breaks over the wilderness of Sinai. Rendered impervious by a rarely disturbed aridity, the barren rocks retain little more water than would the glazed incline of a pyramid, so that the mountain torrents rush down with cyclonic impetuosity, uprooting trees and sweeping off settlements, with no trace left of what man and nature combine to produce.

It was in one of those spasmodic storms that, in the year 1185 after Mohammed's flight from Mecca, a muffled figure moved cautiously in the heart of a cloudburst which was accompanied by blinding flashes of lightning and such thunderbolts as shook the very bedrock of the mountainous desolation. The Bedouin's watch-fires, nightly seen all along the gentler acclivities, vanished before the elemental fury ; and though the plain of al-Rahe opened before him, the lonely wanderer turned his face toward Jebel Musa, or Mount of Moses, betraying his anxiety to remain unrecognized. Wind and rain forced the man to seek shelter somewhere, but he seemed to prefer a dark hollow to the sure hospitality of the Arab's tent. From the heights the torrents came roaring like waterfalls, carrying along piled up masses of uprooted tamarisks, palm-trees, struggling sheep and goats ; even bowlders were swept down like pebbles.

While stopping for a moment, irresolute as to the direction he should take, the muffled figure discerned a human form stranger than his own, whelmed by the flood and on the

point of being either engulfed or crushed to death by the wreck-encumbered torrent. With a rush which endangered his life, the mysterious wanderer caught hold of the forlorn victim, tearing him out of the destructive tide, and as it happened landing him near a cave which he had not before seen. "Touch me not!" cried the rescued creature in a voice that startled his preserver. Yet compared with the rest of his individuality, the voice was the least appalling of his features. There stood a bare-headed being, bent with age, pale as a ghost, lean as starvation, wrinkled as a shriveled hag, shaggy as a bear, his beard descending to his knees, and his hair to his waist. Death stared from his eyes, misery from his face; in all an image of hopelessness, tottering toward the grave. Barely strong enough to drag his limbs, the wretch waddled into the rayless hole, whining and groaning.

The weather's inclemency would have hardly induced the other to divide the cave with one whose aspect suggested the tenant of the graveyard, but the tramp of approaching horses left no time for reflection. Like a

shadow the muffled figure disappeared just in time to escape the notice of two Mamlooks on horses, who, perceiving the hole, drew in the reins with an oath: "Allah tear the devil!—If it were not for my poor horse I would crawl into that black pit to get out of this infernal tempest.—See this cataract! Why, this beats the Nile!—And the hawk we are looking for may as well be leagues out of this wilderness as within it. If we do not hurry to Wady-Feiran, the fever will settle in my belly. I feel cold about the heart," said one of the horsemen.

"Give up the thousand purses set on Ali Bey's head?" asked his fellow.

"Give up the chase of the devil!—The slave-Sultan in not within these black reaches, I say, and we are fools to follow our noses until the breath is out of our stomachs," answered the other impatiently.

A red zigzag flash tore the clouds; the crash threw the horses on their haunches. Had not the astounded Mamlooks scampered off like the wind, the lightning would have revealed to them the object of their hunt, Egypt's

celebrated Sheykh el-Beled, a title tantamount to the power and dignity of Caliph. Such was Ali Bey who, at the close of a career of adventure and romance, was a fugitive in the wilds, with a price set by his enemies upon his head.

"The bloodhounds have lost the spoor of the game, and if my messengers reach Acre safely, my friend Daher will be out in force; but where hide till then?" thought Ali Bey, and proceeded to close up the entrance to his retreat by a pile of rubbish near at hand, darkness favoring the operation.

"Unless there are snakes in this hole, I shall have an hour's rest," said Ali to himself, having completed the hiding wall. A moaning ululation in the dark reminded him of the other presence he had enclosed with himself, and his alarm was not lessened by the sudden glimmer of a something which broke the gloom of the den. Coming as it did from the deep of the hollow, it could not be mistaken for a flare of lightning from without. Another glimmer left no doubt as to its source.

Ali Bey was not a man to quail before any-

thing another man could face; but here was a phenomenon to stop the pulsation of the stoutest heart. A burning jewel, not in the palsied hand of a decrepit dotard, but in the hold of one in the prime of manhood, who resembled the other as closely as a heifer does its dam. Who was he? A son of the former? Or had there occurred the miracle of instantaneous rejuvenescence? Or was it Satan bent on some diabolical performance?—"Man or demon, good or evil power, whoever thou art, I demand of thee in Allah's name to unfold thy mystery to me. Art thou he whom I saved from the fury of the elements? He was nearer a hundred than thirty years; nearer death than life. Thou lookest like him, but couldst be his grandchild as to age and vigor. Art thou and he the same? Or art thou an illusion,—peradventure the spirit of this mountain? If thou art a spirit, thou knowest who I am; if thou art human I charge thee to speak to Ali Bey, the Sheykh el-Beled of Egypt, who is waiting for assistance to defeat the conspiracies of his enemies," spoke Ali with the firmness of despair.

"Sheykh el-Beled," answered the one spoken to in a tone as changed as his form, "there is less of spirit in me than in thee, yet am I less human than man ever was, deathless yet mortal, tossed about on the ocean of time from age to age, century to century, cycle to cycle, millennium to millennium; denied the peace of soul, the comfort of hope, the blessing of prayer, the nepenthe of oblivion, yea, the rest of the grave. Tremble not at the sound of my name. I am *Al Zameri*, the accursed roamer of the times, doomed since the making of the golden calf to begin, rejuvenated after a lapse of every hundred years, anew my unblest career,—homeless, godless, hopeless, shunned, feared and hated!"

"Al Zameri!" ejaculated Ali, who had moved some steps backward horrified.

"That is my name; credulity couples it with sin, greed, famine, war, inundations, hurricanes and pestilence. While thou art within the reach of my breath, warned by instinct, no man will do thee harm," promised the wretched wanderer.

"Allah confound the devil!—Thou wouldst

have perished in the flood if I had not rescued thee; there must be a hidden purpose in the accident of our meeting. Born a slave, destiny has given me the power to defy and defeat the Caliph of Islam. My sword has made me sole ruler over the empire on the banks of the Nile. In open battle I fear no foe; it is conspiracy and the assassin's dagger that I am fleeing, and thy thwarting my pathway, or my thwarting thine, means something to me, Al Zameri. I am in the hand of Allah, the most merciful.—But speak, thou man of immortal woe, how didst thou provoke the anger of thy people's God? Why was the golden idol fashioned? Why by thee? What has been thy experience since?—For few are the Prophet's words in his reference to thy transgression in the Koran," resumed Ali, making the best of his unique acquaintance.

"Sheykh el-Beled, thy kindness, not thy service, requires my acknowledgment. Thy succor was wasted on a man whom perdition would not have. For three thousand years death shuns me as ruthlessly as I long to hug it. My tale is a nightmare of three millenniums,

taking me back to ancient Egypt, where I, a Hebrew, was born into abject slavery. My hot blood resented the taskmaster's rod. In a moment of rage I struck back one of my tormentors, blow for blow, and was with other rebels doomed to dig in one of Pharaoh's copper mines on the coast of Akabah in the valley of Semud. Here many of the Egyptian idols were fashioned, and here I learned the secret of the priests, who caused metallic forms to utter sound, to articulate oracular speech. Certain instruments were skilfully inserted into the interior of the idol, and the priest manipulated them to the great wonderment of the populace, who lay prostrate before their all-knowing, warning or blessing gods. The fraud was guarded by the loss of the tongue that betrayed it.

"I was young and strong when the joyous tidings penetrated our penal colony, that a man of God had afflicted Egypt with plague after plague, insisting that the Israelites be freed from bondage, and we soon read Egypt's doom in the face of our taskmaster. We conspired, made a desperate break for liberty,

and marked our track with the blood of those who offered resistance. Love for parents long missed impelled me to disdain danger. Disguised as an Egyptian, I was determined to steal into the land of the Pharaohs, when one night my progress was stopped by a manifestation in the desert, which filled me with consternation. A pillar of lurid flame, having its base on earth, advanced eastward with a rotatory motion, its upper end obeying a force among the stars. It was a glowing meteor, enormous in volume, endless in height, and terrible to behold, setting earth and heaven on fire, and bathing the desert in fearful glory. As I hurried to get out of the pillar's reach, lest I be consumed, I fell in with the vanguard of my liberated brethren in the rear of their fiery guide. What I saw and heard thrilled me with awe. A power greater than Osiris lowered Egypt to the dust, and that was the God of my people. My father was no more; I embraced my aged mother and one surviving sister, and we wept for joy.

"Before I had been an hour in the great

camp, which extended over many miles, the cry ran from lip to lip, 'We are pursued! The Egyptians are at our heels!' Terror and confusion seized the enormous multitude, men, women and children acting like maniacs, while a throng of lusty fellows, myself among them, pressed on to see what the Man of God was going to do. We found him in company of Aaron and Hur, his countenance beaming, as though it had concentrated the blaze of the flaming pillar to reflect it in a milder beam. He was Moses, the son of Amram. In his hand a staff, his gray beard and curly locks setting off a face of manly firmness, tempered by feminine grace and a visionary dreaminess, his eyes turned fixedly where the top of the fire-pillar lost itself in azure. As if in compliance with his tacit prayer, the prodigious beam swerved from its forward course, wheeled backward to the right, and thus transferred its base from the front of the moving camp to its rear, interposing its volume between the pursuer and the pursued. It was the second watch of the night; we were within a short hour of the Yam-Mitzrayim, the Egyp-

tian Sea,* and a dense fog left us in doubt as to the distance of the enemy behind us. The suspense was unbearable, and Moses was besieged by the rebellious and the craven, who rent the air with reproaches and appeals. He spoke a few words of encouragement, asking the people to faithfully await the salvation of the Lord, but his voice was drowned in the vociferation of the threatening crowd.

"At a hint from Aaron five thousand armed men of the tribe of Levi threw themselves between the great leader and the clamoring mob. It was a critical moment. The undaunted chief spread out his hands in prayer.

"The third watch of the night came with a freezing gale; it raised the fog and revealed a sea lashed by the fury of the growing tempest. It was dawn when the leader, inspired from On High, struck the flood with his staff. The waters rose high, broke, scattered in dust, rose again, tumbled, divided up, and froze, leaving a broad highway dry as the shore. With his brother the leader entered the depth

* The Red Sea, among the Hebrews, was "the Sea of Egypt."

followed by the people, till the whole multitude found themselves between the icy walls, emerging on the opposite shore happy and jubilant.

"Just now the blush of morning in the east was eclipsed by a wave of effulgence west of the Sea of Egypt, and as we turned our eyes thither we were amazed to behold the burning pillar replaced by a sun-crowned power that illumined the heavens with his dazzling panoply and his sword of many flames. That presence sealed the doom of the Egyptians. In their impetuous onward rush they plunged into the jaws of death. The miraculous road was not meant to give them passage; and no sooner were they in the heart of the dry abyss than, by a touch of the leader's staff, the frozen walls, melted by the sun-crowned power, gave way to the devouring sea, burying Egypt's mighty army. The air shivered with the multitudinous shout of joy sent up by our myriads of grateful fugitives. Song, dance and praise commemorated the great event, to be shortly followed by one greater than anything I know of in the annals of man.

"Ah, let me come to the cause of my doom! What happened between the crossing of the Red Sea and the Day of Revelation is on record, but eternity will not efface the picture burned into my memory of what I have, thousands of years ago, witnessed in this wilderness of Zin.

"After a short encampment hereabout, the leader, he the chief of chiefs, made it known that in three days the Majesty Divine would reveal Himself and His truth on the top of Sinai, the interval to be spent in purifying preparations.

"As though all the earthquakes and thunders of the ages were to spend their furious energy within the space of one daybreak, a convulsed earth and a bursting firmament roused a terrified people from their sleep, summoning them to gather at the foot of the fire-belching, quaking, night-shrouded mountain, there to receive the first commandments of the Torah, the Law of the world. They obeyed the summons, but succumbed to the supernatural manifestations. Himself unseen, the voice of the leader was heard from the thick of the

clouds, communing with Omnipotence, the blasts of mighty trumpets intermingling with the bellowing, rumbling and growling of the roused elements. Suddenly a profound silence superseded the universal agitation. Clearly stood out the apex of the mountain, clear spread the horizon; and ear, heart and soul were entranced by the ineffable melody of utterance which came floating from the empyrean. Like the symphony of an angelic chorus, the Ten Commandments vibrated throughout the ethereal spaces, reclaiming the people from their torpor, to be overawed by a wonder exceeding anything they had yet seen. With a background of azure, and the three summits of the Sinaitic range as base, there spread in the clear infinite blue the likeness of inexpressible Majesty in the transcendental shape of a sovereign, crowned with supernal glory,—compassion and benign grace radiating from His dimly discernible features; in His hand an open scroll, covering half the firmament, and showing the Decalogue in sunny splendor, each letter proving but the reflex of a yet grander copy

visibly set in stars far back in the deepest heavens.

"A season of tumultuous rejoicing followed the closing of that soul-thrilling scene, and the emancipated slaves abandoned themselves to indulgences bordering on license. In the whirl of excitement nobody noticed the absence of the venerated prophet, who had not been seen nor heard from since the Day of Revelation, and his family and closest associates were as ignorant of his whereabouts as the rest of the people. But when a whole month had passed by without a token of the prophet's being or doing, the craven-hearted mass took umbrage, fearing they had been deserted both by Moses and his God. Aaron was called upon to allay their apprehensions, but he proved unequal to the exigency. Pressed to supply them with a power to worship, and somebody to lead them, instead of bidding them to have patience and wait, in a moment of weakness he yielded, suggesting that all the golden ornaments of the women be delivered to him, that he might fashion for them a god. If the High-priest hoped that the women would not sacrifice their

jewelry, he was soon undeceived. And I was at hand to lure him into the most heinous of human transgressions.

"Herein centres the enormity of my guilt. Aaron could have never fulfilled his promise had not an evil spirit prompted me to offer him my service in moulding for him a golden calf after the pattern of Egypt's idolatry. Doubting my ability to materialize what I proposed, he gave his assent, and my experience in metal work enabled me to produce a golden calf with the trick of articulating words.

"When the people saw the image and heard it declare itself their god, they went wild with delight, Aaron himself catching the infection. An altar was built, a feast proclaimed, sacrifices offered, and the masses delivered themselves up to orgies.

"The riot of debauch was broken up by the unexpected arrival of the prophet. With his countenance shining like the sun, he rushed down from the mountain, dropped and shattered the tablets, which bore the Commandments he had received from the hand of God, and reduced the idol to powder which he

scattered to the winds. Aaron exonerated himself by pointing to the madness of the people, and to me as the real culprit.—'This Azazel has brought the great sin on the head of the people,' cried he, his eye fixed in fierce hatred on my detested self. What could I advance in extenuation of my devilish authorship?

"Severe punishment was meted out. Four thousand prominent offenders fell under the sword, but I was singled out for a special fate as a warning to coming ages. 'Al Zameri shall not die; Al Zameri shall henceforth wander like Cain, shunned, feared, cursed and hated; Al Zameri shall, at the lapse of a hundred years, revisit the scene of his crime, shall be restored to his present condition, and thus go on and on, until time shall wipe out the memory of his evil deed,' was the verdict I heard. The prophet spoke it under the spell of inspiration, and I was set free.*

* This legend of the Wandering Jew, which so far as I am aware has never before been printed, except for some few references in the Koran, is probably the precursor of the one currently familiar among Christians,

"And free I was, and free I am to roam forever like a mad beast, driven hither by the fury to be transformed at the appointed hour into the young man that I was when malicious

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and it will be seen places the date of the crime that entailed perpetual punishment at some 1500 years earlier. To my mind it possesses much the greater psychological interest. The Koran says:

"And in like manner al Zameri also cast in what he had collected, and he produced unto them a corporeal calf which lowed. And al Zameri and his companions said, This is your god and the god of Moses. . . . . Moses said unto al Zameri, What was thy design, O Zameri? He answered, I knew that which they knew not, wherefore I took a handful of dust from the footsteps of the messenger of God, and I cast it into the molten calf; for so did my mind direct me" (Surah 20).

The presence, and especially the touch, of the outcast is supposed to entail disaster, of which he is bound to warn those with whom he is brought into contact; and it is therefore that Al Zameri cries out to his rescuer (page 24) "Touch me not." The reference in the Koran is, "Moses said, Get thee gone; for thy punishment in this life shall be, that thou shalt say unto those who shall meet thee, Touch me not" (Surah 20).

The roaming Al Zameri has in Oriental folklore a counterpart in the wandering Cain, who also is supposed to live forever.

folly stamped me as the outcast of the human race.

"That same hour I conceived an irrepressible impulse to seek the vast, the void, the desert, the jungle, the swamp,—the unlighted cavern, the place of graves, the ruin,—evading the blessed haunts of man, abhorring sunshine and courting darkness. Daylight blinds me as it does the owl; the sight of gold confounds, its touch burns me. The ferocious beast flees at my approach; the serpent hisses and writhes away. However teeming the region with animal life, however vocal with the song of bird, my passing turns it into a soundless, lifeless wild. I speed with the wind, sweep with the storm, welcome the lightning's flare, the thunder's growl, rage with the elements, curse with the fiends of black Abaddon. The tiger's den is my shelter, my pillow a coil of venomous reptiles. I throw myself into the jaws of the lion, swallow the essence of poison,—it does not avail me. Death is in league with all creation against me. If I try to end my misery by falling into a chasm, I am lighter than air. Water will not drown me, fire will not burn

me, steel will cut my flesh but spares my life, and my dread is life—time—time, endless, hopeless, hateful years,—decades, cycles, millenniums! Such is the sky-ruled destiny of Al Zameri!"

"Horrible is thy fate! Thine is hell on earth, O, son of guilt, who didst ingraft on the race an evil growth,—the worship of gold! Ah, the glittering fetich! What crimes are not traceable to his glossy fascinations!—But the potency of prayer, the tear of remorse dear to Allah the most merciful, the King of the Day of Judgment, are they denied thee?" inquired Ali Bey.

"Prayer, prayer, man's inward heaven, the unction of life, the solace of the soul,—prayer, the heart-feeding stream, with God as its fountainhead and influx, swelled by springs unrevealed and currents vainly searched," exclaimed Al Zameri, striking the palms of his hands together with a clap of pain ;* "prayer

* The familiar Oriental gesture expressing painful emotions is to throw the arms wide apart, and bring the palms of the hands together with a distinct, and often resounding, clap ; then clasping the hands, tremulous with the stress of feeling.

would just as readily commingle with my being as Eden's blessed rivers with the flames of hell. What heaven and earth reveal of the wonderful and holy is deterring to me, whom neither the sublime nor the beautiful inspires, filled as I am with doubt as to whether there be mercy ample enough to cover my guilt.

"Yea, once,—but once,—long before the Orient felt the Roman's iron grip, my lips, prompted by the whisper of a cherub, stammered prayer; and with that inspiration died my feeble hope, leaving a seething caldron in a heart of flint. Ah, from my gloom of hell I had a glimpse of paradise.—Thou hast heard of Balbec's ancient glories, of which her magnificent ruins tell; I saw her in her palmy days, a city of palaces for merchant princes to dwell in, the rival of Tyre, Tadmor and Damascus. Perched on the side of the Anti-Libanus, high above the fertile plain of Sahlat-Ba'albec, and encircled by groves and gardens watered by the valley's never-failing spring of Ra'as-el Ayn, Balbec gloried in rearing great monuments, while the temples dedicated to her gods stood among the marvels of the world.

Whatever was precious, useful, or ornamental, was to be had in the bazaars of Balbec. Caravans carried invaluable treasures through her gates, and the royalties she levied enabled her to display a princely munificence in her domestic affairs. With Syria's fluctuating fortunes, Balbec realized every change, but her deadliest enemy was the earthquake's fearful visitation. Often did I wish to see creation sink in chaos, and myself engulfed in the universal wreckage; but my attempt to find death in one of Balbec's catastrophes, instead of bringing deliverance, brought heaven within my touch, with redoubled anguish as the sequel. Satan has his sport with Al Zameri.

"My memory is aglow as I recall the day of lurid skies, an atmosphere saturated with oppressive vapors, an ominous fluttering of birds, and a spasmodic rumbling, as of explosions underground. Too familiar with the symptoms to misunderstand the nature of the impending disturbance, I was thankful to be near Balbec, in whose ruins I hoped to be buried. Quick as my limbs could carry me, I hurried to the doomed city, and entered it

through one of her gates, which gave me a full view of her famous Great Temple. Terror distracted the multitude, who rushed about, tumbling one against the other, and bellowing like frightened cattle. Repeated shocks opened gaping crevices in the ground, swallowing houses and closing over man and brute. Down came monumental shafts of skilful workmanship; buildings of massive masonry were either lying in heaps, the graves of their inmates, or stood cracked, ready to tumble at the next upheaval. Death was lurking everywhere. Little affected by the wrecks around me, my only thought was to corner death where escape was wellnigh impossible, and I rushed up the grand flight of steps, which took me to the eastern portico of the stupendous edifice, landing me in a large, hexagonal space. It had the dimensions of a court,—which it was not, but a vestibule with one main entrance and two side-doors to the great court, a peristyle circumscribed by columns of artistic chiselling, back of which were numerous recesses adorned by statues of gods. With no one to question my intrusion into the sacred

fane, I stood undetermined and purposeless, when a subterraneous force shook the rock-built foundation of the entablature, which descended with a crash, wrecking the fine statuary by the weight of the fragments. A scream of horror drew me irresistibly in the direction of the voice that uttered it, where, behind a pedestal, I saw a damsel stretched on the floor writhing in convulsions. Bending over the form and raising it from the ground, I held in my arms a being too perfect to be mortal, too substantial to be divine. She was unhurt, except for fright, and, bearing her to the open quadrangle of the peristyle, I seated myself on the floor, allowing her head and shoulders to rest on my lap. 'Art thou the goddess to whom this temple is dedicated?' breathed I. In answer a pair of eyes opened wide, to my indescribable confusion, eyes that would tame the tiger and charm the hydra; but they soon closed again.

"Sheykh, I have seen Sisygambis, Persia's imperial mistress, the dame of Darius, her cheek shaming the jewelled tiara meant to grace majesty. On the tide of the Cydnus,

on a galley, carved, gilded, and inlaid with ivory, gliding to the rhythmic stroke of polished oars, under sails of silk, I saw Cleopatra reclining on the deck, in the shade of a star-spangled canopy, arrayed as Venus, in the midst of voluptuous music, with her women dressed as nymphs, and little boys as Cupids; she moved me no more than did a score of others famed for beauty in their time. But stirred and stricken was I by the matchless damsel chance had thrown in my way, and there I sat intoxicated by a quaff from some heavenly spring thitherto unknown to me. 'If thou wert mine, eternity! what would it matter to me whether the heavens favor me or curse?' muttered I half audibly.

"Once more her opened eyelids laid bare the fountains of bliss, and once more I asked, 'Art thou that one whom the denizens of Balbec worship?'

"Like one waking from a vision she raised her head, raised herself, rose to her height a majestic figure, and, looking down to me with an expression of awe, she answered my question with a question: Whether I was one of

the gods to whose worship her father had consecrated her? 'I am the priestess of chaste Istar. Only a god could save me as thou didst,' cried the maiden, sinking prostrate before me.

"A momentary rocking of the entire structure left but few of the remaining columns erect. The others brought down the Corinthian capitals and the heavy entablature with a tremendous fall, and the great court was one mass of *debris* scattered in every direction.

"The eastern portico being barred by a confused pile of broken columns, the only escape left open was the western end, and hither I carried the fainting priestess, issuing with my burden from the wreck, and finding myself before another building still more beautiful and not yet greatly injured. This was Balbec's Temple of the Sun, a blossom of architecture and sculpture, profusely ornamented by figures of gods and heroes, and finished with a great lavishness of skill and art.

"It was the end of the day, and anxious to shun observation I labored up the stately stairway to seek a refuge in the safer place, not on

my own account but for the sake of the precious creature in my charge. Through a lofty portal I reached two staircases to my right and left, each one leading to the upper story, which was the Temple proper. Here I stopped to take breath, the burden having proved too much for me, and here again I had to look into those open eyes that beamed unutterable things for me.—'Save me, save me, and I will praise and worship thee, god of the sun,' whispered the deluded creature.

"'Be undeceived, fair ministress, I am no god but a man of flesh and blood and untold woes, woes unknown to any mortal but myself,' said I.

"'Thou no god, and a man of untold woes?—Thou art unlike any mortal in look, and who sent thee hither to save me, all others having deserted this fane, priest and priestess fleeing for life? Surely thou art more than mortal, thus to face death undeterred?'

"'Let not a guilt-encumbered fugitive practice deception on thee, ministress of Istar. Thou art right, alas! I am not mortal; but cursed to wander and suffer, because of a great

sin committed thousands of years ago,' cried I, and briefly enlightened her as to my nature and my doom. Tender compassion radiated from her immaculate countenance as, seizing my hand with a hold that thrilled my frame with ravishing delight, she spoke these words:

"'O, let me alleviate thy suffering by sharing thy misery, poor, erring man, who didst offend Zicara and his progeny! Yea, I will pray in thy behalf!—Hear me, Zicara, the all-powerful, and thou, Ea, the holder of life and knowledge, the ruler of the abyss, the king of the rivers and gardens, the mate of Bahu, who begot Bal Merodach,—hear me and restrain the seven evil spirits from besetting Al Zameri, but send the good ones to placate his conscience, that he have rest and peace, after an atonement long and awful! Yea, my life for his, Zicara, if propitiation cannot otherwise be had, since he has imperilled his life for mine!'

"Even while these fervid words dropped from the sweet lips of the kneeling supplicant, the roving mania seized me deliriously. I turned my face toward the nearest exit, but felt my garment caught by the hands that had

been folded in prayer.—'Flee not hence before I kiss the hands which brought me succor,' cried the maiden passionately stirred. Burning kisses covered my hands; a tingling woe permeated the core of my being; I kissed the head, the cheek, the mouth of the one in the wide world, who had offered to share my fate, had offered her life for mine. But adamantine chains could not check my madness to fly; I broke away from her embrace, whose lamentations cut into my heart.

"A pack of hell-hounds yelping at my heels would have added little to the mad pace that carried me to the dreary haunts of the mountains,—the wailing of the girl, and her image, following me as new fuel to feed the fire of despair. Broken by overwhelming wretchedness, I fell where a steep rock barred my way, and then, after a chain of tearless cycles, I wept,—yea, and prayed for mercy,—ah! to be delivered as it may please Him, whom I displeased!

"With sleep came a figure clad in supernatural brightness,—'Matatron the messenger of grace, who spreads man's prayers before

the Throne, speaks to thee, Al Zameri! Between thy prayer and His Mercy stands a world of evil, fostered by the fetich of thy making. Thou hast seduced the people chosen to redeem mankind. When the race shall deem the chase of gold a thing as base as rapine, as vile as lust,—then will the fever of thy soul abate. Till then live on, the symbol of insatiate greed, a living Sodom, weltering in the fetid pool of spiritual stagnancy!'" And Al Zameri was silent, burying his wretched face in his hands.

"Truly, gold in itself is not an evil; it is the root of the world's evil, the leprosy of the heart, incurable as the lung's consumption that reddens the cheek while it drains the life, and thy guilt in reference thereunto is as dark as thy punishment is great," spoke Ali. "I am that country's lord where I have been slave; courage has done much for me, but gold the most,—yea, and the worst to make woman foul, and man her villain. Here Mammon is the king of kings. Ali Bey is a fugitive from assassins bought for gold, and Islam's Caliph depends for sovereign ease and safety

less on valor and loyalty than on the bribe. Thou hast raised gold to be an idol, on whose altars man's heart, his honor and his peace, and woman's virtue, are too often sacrificed. Therefore, run thy course, Al Zameri; fulfil great Allah's decree, that man take heed lest in His just anger He drown this world in a boiling flood of liquid gold!"

A few stones removed from the entrance of the cave enabled the cursed roamer to slip out like a phantom, and with him passed the storm, leaving a chill around the heart of the Bey.

"Allah akbar! This meeting forebodes Ali's downfall, I fear. It is my evil star that caused the wretch to thwart my way," said Ali Bey to himself. Subsequent developments proved his presentiment prophetic; in an ambush placed for his destruction, the celebrated Sheykh met his death.

SHEDDAD'S PALACE OF IREM.

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SHEDDAD and Sheddid, the sons of Ad and the grandsons of Uz, acquired great fame in Hadramaut, where they saw light in Ahkaf, a region of deserts bordered by deserts, desolate as Hejaz, sterile as Tehamah, burning as Dahna "the red," frightful as Gobi, and less explored than Sahara. The ancient Hebrews spoke of Hadramaut as *Hazarmaveth*, the "court of death," and this sepulchral name is fully accounted for by its black rocks, which here and there show head above the sifting sand-ridges, like so many colossal coffins in the midst of the gloomiest of graveyards. Here the tribe of Ad not alone prospered, but accomplished things forever memorable in tale and song.

While traversing the desert of Han-Hai Marco Polo reports to have seen ghostly apparitions; and heard them speak, calling people by their names, and startling the drivers of

the caravan by such strange noises as the tramp of horses, the beating of drums, and the blowing of trumpets and other musical instruments. The Oriental counts those spectral manifestations in the deserts as one of the many aspects of the world's spiritual mystery, and the ancient Arab never entered a waste in the dark without this propitiatory expression of confidence uttered with the solemnity of prayer: "I fly for refuge unto the prince of this region, that he may protect me against the foolish of his domain."

It is the Bedouin's conviction that countless ages before the creation of Adam myriads of Jinn or genii were created of fire, and enjoyed the blessings of this world under successive rulers who bore the generic name of Suliman. These airy creatures, however, being of inferior quality, are not alone subject to mortal wants, like eating, drinking and propagating, but are corruptible and perishable; so that when their wickedness provoked Allah's anger, he ordered Eblis to drive them into the most inhospitable deserts, where they are kept in rigid seclusion, but not without a certain

latitude of action. For they are permitted to exercise their potential energies, and indulge their various inclinations for good or for evil, some being malignant, others beneficent. The fairy-like Peri, the gigantic Div, and the sinister Tacwins or fates, are referred to in the Koran, which fact renders doubt in their existence out of the question.

Now, the secret of Ad's power, which enabled him to flourish and multiply in the heart of desolation, was a host of Jinn placed at his command by his father Uz, the son of Aram, who was the son of Shem, one of Noah's three offspring. With superhuman agents to carry out his designs, Ad conceived the idea of building the most stupendous palace on earth in the wilderness of Aden, and he intimated the project to his older son Sheddad. Sheddad's imagination was set aflame, but the vastness of the scheme rendered its realization somewhat doubtful, the nature of the resources notwithstanding.

"Thy plan, father, surpasses in magnitude that of the Tower of Babel, but my ambition would surround the grandest palace under the

heavens with a garden like unto Paradise, provided thy means are ample enough to do it," said the firstborn of Ad.

"Palace and garden shall rise by invisible hands!" exclaimed Ad boastfully, and proceeded with the sketching of his design on the sand.

The palace was to be reared on a plateau as high as the highest land of Yemen, should have sufficient accommodation for his progeny multiplied a thousandfold, and its surpassing feature was to be a hall of superb magnificence, with room for the throne of a king to stand in the midst of his court and his warriors, the grand edifice to be enwreathed by a garden like Eden, and to be accessible and visible only at the royal bidding.

Ad's fabulous dream was again improved upon by his inventive son, who proposed to have a city of princely dwellings cluster around the palace, the garden to surround the whole, and to be enclosed by a wall with stately portals. The additional feature commended itself to Ad, but the execution of the scheme was accompanied by an element of danger of which

its projectors were unaware, and which proved fatal to its originator. Believing the hour ripe for the work to begin, Ad repaired one dark night, unaccompanied, to the dismal region to set himself aright with the potent instruments he had depended on for the actualization of his dream. Whether unnerved by the dismal dreariness of the desert, or confused by an instinctive dread of the supernatural machinery to be set in motion, the conjuror uttered the wrong formula, and the sequel was appalling. For instead of the beaming spirits he expected to bow to him, a hideous legion wagged their tails, having descended on him like a tempest, frowning and grinning, their eyes darting fury and hatred. Ad had unwittingly disturbed the dreaded Tacwins, who would have torn him to pieces but for the mystic signet he held in his hand, the talisman which, in a later age, enabled Solomon to capture Ashmodai and rule over myriads of genii. The terror of the moment, however, paralyzed the heart of the unfortunate wizard. Ad was found dead, and was greatly mourned by his family and the tribe that bore his name.

Undeterred by the tragic end of his father, Sheddad, now the acknowledged head of his tribe, and the owner of the potent seal, took his brother Sheddid into the secret, asserting it to be their filial duty to complete at all hazard what their sire had begun. Sheddid was not of the adventurous type; he preferred the ease of the tent to enterprises fraught with danger, and besought his brother to desist from an attempt which had already proved fatal, declaring himself content to be simply one of the tribe. Sole master of the situation, however, Sheddad burned with impatience to see his dazzling vision assume the form of reality; and wholly reckless as to danger, proceeded to act in the manner planned by his father and himself. He proved more successful than Ad in putting himself in communication with the friendly Jinn subject to his will, and astonished them with the sketch he drew of what he meant them to accomplish for him; for by this time the previous outline was even more expanded, and his commands were set forth with irrevocable authority.

"You are required to build for me a city

never to be equalled, still less to be excelled, by anything art or skill may attempt to produce; it is to be the home of a people a thousand times more numerous than the tribe of Ad, and its crowning marvel is to be my palace,—of a splendor befitting a king of kings, and of an amplitude to afford room for a great court and an army.* Grounded on a rocky foundation on a level with Yemen's highlands, the city's walls and dwellings shall be white as alabaster, but the palace shall be of onyx, trimmed with gold and set with gems. Twelve gorgeous halls shall be named after the signs of the zodiac, all opening upon one grander than them all, beneath a dome lucent as the

* The Koran has this reference to the Palace of Irem, showing that it was already a tradition before the time of Mohammed:

"Hast thou not considered how the Lord dealt with Ad, the people of Irem, adorned by lofty buildings, the like whereof hath not been erected in the land?" (Surah 89; "The Daybreak.")

That Sheddad, having planted a garden in imitation of the heavenly paradise, had been smitten by lightning on his way hither, is another variation of the widely known legend.

firmament, illumined by a sun, a moon, and scintillating stars, moving at the king's will around his throne that shall blaze with what is most precious and brilliant in those jewels which rival the lustre of the constellations. Vaults for treasures, apartments for feasting, pavillions for ease, recesses for love, grottoes for coolness, cisterns for bathing, colonnades for pleasure, balconies for survey, and seats for delight, shall make my palace inimitable for all time. And city and palace shall be embedded in an Eden of foliage, blossom and fruit, animated by birds of lustrous plume and sweetest song. Tax your skill to build more perfect than I know to ask for, but never less; and let your magic make the retreats inaccessible without the pleasure of the king," closed Sheddad, inwardly sorry that his inventive faculty lagged behind his vaulting ambition to be unexcelled in grandeur and glory.

"Master of the potent seal," replied the chief of the shining files, "thy behest is our concern. In eleven nights Sheddad shall stamp our work with his approval." Elevated in his own estimation to the rank of a king of

kings, and conscious of a power equal to that of a god, it required but a slight incentive for Sheddad's vanity to overleap itself, and infernal Eblis was at hand to furnish it. In the guise of an angel, the devil bewildered the architect of Irem by saluting him as a god.—"Born of a woman, thine is the homage due to a prince of the skies, before whom spirits bow, exalted Sheddad!" spoke the Satanic deceiver with a profound salaam, and rose on his mighty wings to vanish in the void of the desert.

After this Sheddad would not have been astonished to hear the stars proclaim his majesty, but he was surprised when, having listened to his marvellous tale of the city the Jinn would build for him, Almena, his favorite wife, beheld an evil omen in the fact that, in his plan of sumptuous building, Sheddad had neglected to provide for the worship of the only true God.

"How could Sheddad forget him who created the heavens and the earth, the stars and the spirits, and whose just wrath wiped out the people in the time of our ancestor Noah?

God's temple ought to rise high above thy palace, or it will not stand, even according to the prophecy of Hud, thy uncle, whose words were confirmed by signs from On High," expostulated Almena. "Woman, thy Sheddad is a god, and shall be worshipped because of his potency, and the favors he may bestow on those who shall please him. A heavenly power paid me homage before I entered this tent, and in eleven nights the tribe of Ad will see the wonder of the world. My palace shall be their temple, my throne their altar, thyself their goddess, and Sheddad their god!" cried the infatuated chief.

Almena was a frail daughter of Eve, and Sheddad's picture of their prospective divinity, sustained as it was by an angel's confirmation, converted her to share her husband's madness. The thoughts that occupied them during the day came in weird visions during the night, —throngs kneeling in adoration before them, burning incense and wafting expiatory invocations, and kings hurrying from the ends of the earth to receive their crowns and sceptres from Sheddad's grace. On the tribe, it was

deemed best that their chief's godship should burst as a revelation.

While the tribe of Ad were soundly asleep in their tents, a man and a woman slipped cautiously out of the encampment. They were mounted on two fast dromedaries, and glided like spectres into the heart of the desert, buried in night and silence. Once more Eblis played his infernal trick on the deluded Sheddad, now in company of his bewitched Almena, by a renewed mock-adoration offered as by a winged cherub. For it is hardly necessary to state that the infatuated couple were on their way to the abode of their future felicities. They had not been riding many hours before the level, blank face of the waste softened into undulations scantily covered with that vegetation which the camel alone is capable of digesting,—its gastric capacities being almost equal to that of the ostrich,—and the outlook indicated rising ground. A stretch had to be crossed punctuated by black rocks in ever-increasing number, until the wilderness looked a stony maze of dismal projections worn smooth by the grinding sands, ever moving

with the gusts of hot air; and the East indicated daybreak when Sheddad and Almena ascended a height from which they could survey a vast horizon, bordered on the south-east by sea, but presenting otherwise the sterility of Arabia Deserta. A curious and perplexing paralysis of speech deprived them of the interchange of sentiments, and an up-hill advance of a mile or so brought them before an arched portal of imposing stateliness, opening on a great city, half-hidden from view by the sylvan and floral wealth of an Eden.

Husband and wife exchanged a look of amazement, strangely debarred from an audible articulation of feeling just when there was so much to be wondered at. There being nobody to hinder, no one to welcome them, Sheddad and Almena tied their brutes to the glittering handles of the brazen gates, and proceeded to take sovereign possession of what they considered their indisputable domain. The ascending avenue before them might have been called "The Vista of Enchantment." Sinuous in its course, its moss-bedded windings were bordered by crystal rivulets which came down,

broken by impediments, in bounding cascades, the water teeming with fish of tints recalling the changeful blushes of Aurora. Towering trees shaded, with their intertwining crowns of delicious leafage, a tropical exuberance of lesser growths weighed down with luscious fruit or glowing and sparkling with soft colors forming part of a delightful disorder of shrubs and vines, climbing, winding, crawling, hanging and blooming, but receding here and there to uncover the placid mirror of a lake limpid as beryl, or a spring of the coolest and purest liquid, all approachable by a hundred intercrossing pathways, lined and so softly carpeted that the unsandaled foot paced as on a silken rug of the finest texture. Here the bulbul's note was drowned in a concert of rival warblers, whose melodies were as sweet as their feathers were coruscant.

With ravenous greed Sheddad and Almena surrendered to the garden's temptations, swallowing great quantities of precious fruit, but feeding a hunger that seemed to grow with its glutting; nor did the cooling drink they greedily imbibed allay their parching thirst. But the

whetted appetite rendered the sensuous enjoyment resistlessly fascinating; and, the choice of the food being seemingly unlimited, husband and wife would have abandoned themselves altogether to physical indulgence, had not an overpowering sight burst on them, like a vision from a suddenly opened heaven.

They were on the point of ascending a terrace laid out with all the arts of magic, and enwreathed with all the bounties of nature, when they reached the entrance to an enormous square, superbly enclosed by what appeared a score of palaces blended in one mass of variegated splendors, the one at the opposite end overtopping the others by a dome which blazed in the sun's radiance, as though set with carbuncles. Symmetrically proportionate to the size of the grand space ran a depression defined by a line of artistic shafts of alabaster, capped with globes of burnished gold studded with gems, and rising majestically above a grove of enameled green, thick with odoriferous bloom. In the heart of the depression was a basin filled with a rushing water as transparent as the sky, and enlivened by star-

dotted swarms of the finny tribes. It was an azure stream in an Elysian garden, in the heart of a succession of edifices far beyond the limits of human resources and ingenuity. Except for the feathered musicians, and the zephyr which stirred the air and foliage, not a sound was heard, nor a creature to be seen. The overawing majesty of an architecture that dwarfed pantheons into monuments of man's vain endeavor to imitate the inimitable, and the gorgeousness which could not be thought of without remembering the limitations of earthly art and treasures however great, justified to himself Sheddad's conceit that he was more than human, a consciousness now at last fully shared by Almena. Still unable to express their wonderment in words, they resorted to gestures and grimaces, as though the tale of Babel was to have a sort of counterpart in the story of Sheddad's palace of Irem. And their wonder rose in intensity as, entering the left wing of the palace by a sublime portico, the lofty vaulted spaces, communicating by exquisitely carved arches, imparted the illusion that the ceilings were

as high as heaven and sparkled with real stars.

An implied welcome was extended to them in the first apartment by a banquet set in a begemmed service of golden vessels,—dainties and beverages fit for gods. Hours busily spent at the sumptuous board did neither appease their hunger nor quench their thirst. Every morsel and every quaff sharpened the craving for more. When they succeeded in tearing themselves from the table's inexhaustible dishes, their progress through the palatial spaces consumed more time than they were aware of, the fascinations being as varied as they were marvellous. For incomputable as was the wealth, and lavish the ornamental art bestowed on each and every room traversed, their main charm lay in the optic illusions, causing Sheddad and his companion to laugh with amusement and wonder, to scream with astonishment, or to shudder with horror.

Yielding to a woman's inquisitiveness, Almena was always a little in advance of her husband, always eager to be yet more surprised, and her eagerness was fully gratified.

Once when a scream of laughter brought Sheddad to his wife's side, he found that what she had mistaken for clear water, rippled by a breeze, was indeed the solid floor of a long green archway, imparting the illusion of a stream flowing under cover of beautiful trees; Almena had prepared to cross it, with her sandals off, and her skirts raised, imagining the water to wave gently in a bed of golden sand. Here, again, she recoiled with terror from the glaring eyes of a crouching lion, ready to fly at her in a rage; there she stood paralyzed at the sight of the deadly *rukta*, rolled up in a coil on an imperial divan, with her fangs pointed, and her eyes glaring. In this manner the most formidable species of the animal kingdom faced them in threatening postures throughout the entire palace, often environed by their natural conditions, always in a pose of aggressive ferocity. Yet all this notwithstanding, Sheddad affected the lofty bearing of a god in his realm; strode haughtily along the mysteriously echoing halls, the echoes of which ere long mixed with strains of music sweet beyond expression.

Drawn by the swelling harmonies, they descended a stately flight of stairs landing on a platform whence, descending another flight, they beheld themselves at the extreme end of an enormous cavern bathed in a translucent haze of an unearthly luminousness. The muffled rumble of a distant waterfall blended enchantingly with waves of melody that floated incomprehensibly through the weird mazes of the honey-combed hollow extending endlessly in cavernous, inaccessible spaces, passes and galleries. Availing themselves of conveniently protruding stepping-stones, the explorers ventured into the nethermost ranges, fairly brightened by the reflex of a stalactitic display, grotesque in shape, bulky in size, and indefinable in color, every known hue blending into a magic play of ever-changing spectra, and suggesting the idea that the palace above was the blossom of which the underground masses were the roots. Here they stood bewitched by the symphonies they could not account for, and by a scenery human genius may dream of, but never imitate.

While divided between the delights of the

ear and the charm of the eye, Sheddad and Almena lost no sight of a crystal barrier behind which flowed a clear water alive with luminous fish, and through which they had a glimpse of things above, recognizing it to be the bed of the rushing stream that flowed in the court of the palace, fed by unexplorable cisterns, and discharging its volume into an unsounded abyss. As they advanced the wonders multiplied. Fluted pillars of snowy alabaster, draped and marvellously traced by invisible hands; towering shafts of white, red, amber and blue; hanging balconies of gossamer lightness, trimmed with scarfs finer than the Indian shawl; canopies bristling with numberless crystals of every tint and shape; cataracts petrified in the act of precipitation; grottoes, fountains, streamlets and cascades, with a myriad other exhibitions of magic art, filled subterraneous spaces of unmeasured magnitude.

Progressing through irregular archways and winding passages, Sheddad and Almena were lost in the labyrinth. Remembering, however, that the crystal basin ran along the

grand court above, Sheddad followed its length and discovered a way to an ascent which took them to a broad stairway. This was the entrance from below to a colonnade of astonishing height and dimensions, covering the entire width of the court, and having at both extremes grand flights of steps, leading up to the wing of the palace crowned by the blazing dome.

If the son of Ad and his consort marveled at what they had seen hitherto, they felt stupefied as ascending they stood before a golden arch wrought in imitation of the rainbow, revealing the all-outshining throne-hall, rising high above the lofty throne. Four tigers erect on their haunches held up with their forepaws the seat of majesty, a gorgeous divan bedecked with priceless jewels, under a lofty canopy shaded by tapestries of matchless fabric and embroidery. To the right, suspended from the roof of the canopy, hung the sceptre, a mace incrusted with brilliants; to the left the crown, of dazzling splendor; above the throne sun, moon, and stars were scattered within the concave of the dome, while the

twelve adjoining halls similarly represented the signs of the zodiac, thus completing a startling illusion of the heavens.

As though driven by an irresistible force, Sheddad, with the firm step of a king, advanced to take possession of his throne, Almena watching him with a throbbing heart. Nine steps had to be ascended before the seat could be reached. The aspirant to godship thought he felt the deadly breath of the tigers, whose distended claws and furious eyes threatened destruction, but he nerved himself and ascended the royal seat. Simultaneously with his touch upon the throne the crown descended on his head, the sceptre flew into his hand, while a mantle of radiance clothed his frame. Sheddad felt that he was a god, for his coronation was confirmed by the immediate action of sun, moon and stars, which began to move in their respective orbits, shedding mellow light, and filling the spaces with sweet strains.

From his exalted seat Sheddad had for the first time an extended view of his dominion, and he realized that what he had seen thus far was but the heart of the whole, which seemed

unbounded in extent and unapproachable in magnificence. It was manifest that palace and court formed the focus of a great city, spreading in many directions in avenues shaded by trees and cooled by delicious springs, placid lakes, playing fountains, and bubbling streamlets. Why should he lose a moment to reveal himself to his tribe as their god and lead them hither triumphant in confirmation of his godship? Who on earth was mightier than he?

He rose. The sceptre slipped from his hand, the crown from his head, the mantle from his shoulders. Everything stood still. The song died. A dimness spread around him. The eyes of the tigers glared viciously. He stood by the side of his wife. They joined hands, hurried down and out into the open air to find that it was twilight and sultry. Surely the garden was less green, the flowers less fresh, the air less balmy, and the water less transparent than before. The song of the birds had changed into a melancholy chirrup, and their eyes glowed with threatening fierceness. From the water of the basin the fish pierced the

royal pair with their fiery eyes, and the breeze moved lamenting through the corridors and trees. With a woman's instinct of impending danger, Almena led the way out of the court; but the garden was plunged in a mist, which made impossible a quick exit from the sylvan entanglements. While trying to strike the main avenue, they fell in with their dromedaries browsing contentedly in the thick of the most exquisite shrubbery, with neither saddle nor rope available for use. The brutes looked unaccountably shaggy; they turned to run at the approach of their master, and did not stop until they had passed the gateway of which Sheddad was in quest. Here the saddles were found, shabby and mouldy, were placed where they belonged, the camels having submitted to the goad, and the homeward journey began.

A deep sigh escaped Almena's breast as the distance widened between them and the enchanted city, and when she found words she began solemnly: "Sheddad, what is it we have seen and passed through? Cold runs my blood when I think of the place; and dost

thou mean to re-enter it as our permanent home?"

"Thou art a woman, or thou wouldst know that what Sheddad conjured out of naught, Sheddad will as master rule and own. Are not those spirits subject to my will?" was the imperious answer.

"Thou wilt bear patiently with thy Almena, my lord; but are not the looming cities and splendid gardens often seen in the haze of the desert the dread of the lured Arab, who, mistaking them for fertile oases, rushes to destruction? Verily, the wiles of Eblis are numberless, and thy great palace is destitute of the sacred place to prove it a work of the friendly Jinn. Thy father's end be thy warning, O, light of mine eyes!" cried the woman appealingly.

"Art thou the wife of Sheddad, or of Sheddid? Let woman be timid, but no man be craven. The signet on my finger scorns infernal traps. Thou hast seen me on the awful throne destined to be the worship of nations, and thou art to share in the divine sovereignty of thy Sheddad.—But, O, Almena, why is thy

voice so unlike the one I have ever heard since the days of our youthful love? It sounds as though thou art speaking to me from the hollow of a cave," spoke the son of Ad uneasily.

"Thou hast taken this question from my lips, my lord; for thy speech is so unfamiliar to my ear that, were I not near thee, I should mistake it for an echo heard in the mountains of Yemen," confessed the daughter of the desert.

There was no time for another remark. The air swarmed with thousands of lurid Cupids, each one holding a tiny harp under his left arm. Flocking together, they interlocked in such a fashion as to form a stupendous arch, perfect in shape and burning like a crescent cut from the effulgent sun. On the top of the curve alighted one larger than his compeers, his outstretched arms pointing a glittering tiara in the direction of Sheddad, whose advance was greeted with voluptuous strains:

"Hail, our chief, thy sceptre sway!
Rule Irem, Sheddad, we obey!
Thy seal bade spirits be thy thralls,
Hail, god of Irem's magic halls!"

With the dying of the choral apostrophe, the treacherous vision conjured by Eblis to dispel Almena's intuitive fear of something dreadful to come faded away. The sure-footed dromedaries picked their way among the bleak rocks and the sand ridges, with not a glimmer to break the darkness nor a syllable to spur them on. Sheddad and Almena continued silent under the overpowering spell of the sight, which soared before their mental vision long after it had vanished to the eye.

Daybreak found them near a solitary cliff known for the brackish water, oozing from one of its cracks, and the scanty browsing nearby fit for camels. Turning to his fresh water supply to appease his thirst, Sheddad found the water-skin not only empty, but as dry as an old hide, while the figs he held in reserve were mouldy and hard as stone. Almena had the same experience. Unaccountable as appeared this discovery, it was less of a surprise than the cadaverous aspect of husband and wife, as they looked into each other's faces in full daylight. "Thou dost not look like thyself, my lord; there is neither blood in

thy veins nor a beam of life in thine eye," cried the startled mate of the aspiring god.

"And thou hast described thy own looks, O, Almena.—It is but the withering of our mortal substance before our beings are impregnated with immortal virtue," assumed Sheddad with an air of supreme indifference, in which, however, his heart failed to share. Almena's ghastly countenance, once the seat of radiant beauty, struck a chord of unexpressed pain in the heart of her besotted consort.

The consternation of the tribe of Ad, on learning that a dead pair mounted on two bulky *delools** was on the point of entering their encampment, may be imagined. The news was brought by some Arabs, who, perceiving the approach of the strangers, made a sally, but hurried back with the horrifying alarm, "The dead are coming!" Whoever could run took to his heels, leaving the infirm old and the helpless young to face the ghosts, who entered the settlement and took possession of the largest tent, the one just vacated by Sheddid,

* A *delool* is a dromedary trained and used as a saddle animal, and not as a burden carrier.

who was among the first to deny himself the enjoyment of the uninvited visitors.

"If we have undergone a change, so has this place and all things hereabout in but a few days; our young camels have grown large and fat,—and who is this sleeping child?" asked Sheddad, pointing to a half-naked maiden stretched on a mat upon the ground.—"Can this be our Chaviva?"

"Our daughter!" exclaimed the mother hysterically, recognizing in the girl of seven the child of two years. "Either we see wrong or things are wrong," added the woman, greatly troubled.

"Neither this nor that; we are not the same, our sight is not the same, but the world around us is the same, only that we see it magnified, as higher beings must see; else how could the powers above take cognizance of what is going on below?" argued Sheddad with self-approving plausibility.

While Almena waited for her child to waken, Sheddad proceeded to investigate the neighborhood with the view of gathering an audience to whom to reveal himself. In vain did the

hapless old men and women hide themselves from the searching eye of the cadaverous chief; he ferreted them out and warned them to beware of his wrath. "Inform the tribe, and let Sheddid know, that Sheddad and Almena have dwelt in the land of the spirits as god and goddess, and that I am come to take you into an Eden of endless felicities, if you only say, 'Lead on, Sheddad.'"

"Hast thou not dwelt with the dead all that time?" asked a trembling crone.

"No, daughter of the noble tribe; during the five days we have been away——"

"Five years!" interrupted a chorus of voices. "For five years have Sheddad and Almena been missed and mourned as lost," supplemented the aged female to the unspeakable consternation of his godship. He had spent years, instead of hours, in the magic palace, and everything contributed to confirm the astounding fact. Yet, however amazed, Sheddad's faith in his superhumanity was so deeply rooted that the new revelation occurred to him as but another evidence of his supernatural destiny. To continue for five years without

regular food and sleep was to him a most striking proof of his transmutation, while the many years that passed like so many hours attested the blessedness of the seat he had created.

The one man of the tribe, who was most concerned and least delighted with Sheddad's return from what he believed to be the real beyond, was his own brother Sheddid, who wished himself a thousand miles away from the spot; not that he was jealous of the rights attaching to his brother's primogeniture, but because he shuddered at the thought of meeting him, to say nothing of his aversion to the conjurer's chimerical projects. However, having nerved himself to the emergency, Sheddid faced his brother with the question whether he was determined to lead his people into a realm whence they would return like him, looking more dead than alive.—"An evil influence sways thy heart, O, my brother. The children of Ad are happy, why tempt them into a snare spread by Eblis?"

Sheddad replied with a glowing outline of the Eden in store for them who would follow him. "That ye may all be convinced of the

truth my words contain, this coming eve a mist shall rise from the bosom of Hadramaut, and with it shall ascend the image of the palace and city embedded in gardens like unto Paradise. Remain in the waste ye who love it; but ye who prefer the marble habitation, the cool walk, the cooler spring, the crystal bath, the delicious fruit, the mellow sunshine, the sights of wonder, and the rule of the world, to the dark tent, the scanty meal and the arid region,—are welcome to share them with Sheddad," cried he with godlike benignity.

This offer was received with a wild shout by the fiery children of the desert, and the promised mirage was expected with intense interest. Retiring to his tent, the mighty wizard summoned the chief of the Jinn and charged him with the task of conjuring up the picture of the Palace of Irem. Sunset was the signal for every eye to turn toward the desert. With nightfall came a pellucid silveriness, which transformed the wilderness into an atmospheric canvas whereon rose, looming in perfect outline and majestic proportions, the

city, palace and gardens of Irem. Wild joy yielded to a sober sense of awe before him who thus proved his claim to worshipful reverence. —"Lead us, divine Sheddad," was the cry, followed by the taking down of tents and the loading of camels, the whole tribe being seized by the one passion, to possess and inhabit the grandest and happiest of cities. Sheddid was obliged to choose between remaining behind or going with the tribe, and he threw in his lot with the multitude, his evil forebodings notwithstanding.

The march was opened with dance and song, Sheddad and Almena leading the motley caravan; but soon voices other than human began to disturb the pregnant silence of the dismal waste. Sheddad's name was heard articulated to the accompaniment of heart-chilling laughter. As if goaded by demons to madness, the camels grew vicious, throwing women and children from their backs and trampling them to death, so that everybody hoped for day to deliver them from terror. But there was no break in the night, although it seemed as long as three nights in one; and when light finally

broke on the caravan it came so suddenly that it almost blinded the confused Arabs. And with it came a noise from On High, a noise like that of a myriad roaring lions, growing, swelling and reverberating till heaven appeared in uproar, — earth trembling, the desert glowing like a furnace, the sands rising and whirling like a cyclone of ignited gases, and exploding in vitriolic sheets of fire. Man and brute tried to bury their heads in the burning sands. The catastrophe was too terrible for flesh to survive. In his agony Sheddad felt the signet slip from his finger. Struck deaf and dumb, the son of Ad perished with his entire following, the cyclonic fire consuming them flesh and bone. Only those whom weakness or the love of little ones detained behind remained to build up again the almost annihilated tribe of Ad.

Such was the punishment of Sheddad for his aspiration to godship. His name lives in Arabia's legendary lore. Down to this day Allah preserves the city and palace as a monument of divine retribution, and numerous are the tales of straying pilgrims or lost Bedouins,

who have been favored with a glimpse of it. Among these is Kalabah who, having lost himself in the desert while in search of a camel, suddenly found himself before the gate of a dazzling city. He entered it, but was so overawed by the dead stillness therein that he fled its precincts in horror, taking with him an invaluable stone as a memento. This he showed to the Caliph Madwigah in confirmation of his adventure,—as is duly recorded.

THE MYSTERY OF THE DAMAVANT.

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AS a somewhat distant offshoot of the Elburz the Damavant is a solitary pile, of imposing proportions, generally admitted to be Persia's most graceful mountain. Seen from a vantage point in Tehran, cloud-crowned Damavant appears to be the real shoulder of sky-bearing Atlas, losing its head in ether and its foot in a forest of the semi-tropical varieties, dense to the degree of inaccessibility. The wild beast is here at home; the tiger, bear, wolf, panther and wild boar, finding in these jungles an abundance of food, a safe retreat, and a cool spring to satisfy thirst. While the gentler slopes are covered by extensive, fruit-bearing orchards, there are crests and hollows in

the Elburz system which the eagle's eye alone has seen, and there are peaks which, but for the sinuous furrows cut by the wild torrents after heavy showers, no human foot could ever ascend. Spirits are believed to haunt the caves and impenetrable thickets of those mountains, a belief sustained by mocking echoes and multiple reverberations started by the least noise; and the simple Iranian folk look up to him with awe, who dares sojourn above the settled line of demarcation dividing the earthly from the unearthly. The history of religion, poetry and superstition is inextricably intertwined with the weird mystery which hangs over the unapproachable heights and deeps of mountains.

It was through a bewildering gorge, which heavy rain transforms into the bed of a wild torrent, that, in the year 410 of the Hegira, two men of note, preceded by four experienced mountain-climbers, were toiling uphill determined to penetrate into the seemingly impenetrable wonderland of the Damavant's south-easterly acclivity. The attempt implied hard work and great risk, and

"Determined to penetrate into the seemingly impenetrable wonderland of the Damavant." Page 92.

the wonder of it was that one of those two men betrayed the unmistakable signs which indicate high age. Clothed in the habit of a dervish, the white-headed climber assisted his infirmity by a strong staff, but now and then had to be helped over an impediment by the brawny arms of the vigilant attendants. His companion, who was a much younger and stronger man of dignified bearing, wore the garb of nobility and the air of command, leaving no doubt as to his being one in power and authority. At every step he took in advance his eye reverted to the decrepit figure back of him. "The return will be easier," said he to the older man with a sympathetic smile.

"Thou hast spoken truth; the return is the easiest part; the coming hither, and the *being*, that is the trouble," answered the other, his luminous face marked by the deep furrows of age and sorrow.

"With Mahmud of Ghaznin out of thy mind, Firdusi, would that still be thy mood?" inquired the younger man in a soft voice.

"Mahmud's court is the sea of evil which swallowed my island of happiness. Whom

did I murder that I should be a footsore fugitive like the blood-stained son of Adam ?" cried the old man in a faltering tone, having stopped to take breath.

"Thy ethereal spirit has murdered grossness, giving this world a foretaste of Eden. Thy *Shah-Namah* is the song of the skies, and Eblis, who revels in discord and confusion, took vengeance on thee by poisoning Mahmud's mind, O, Firdusi.—Thy own version shows not that thy enemy is Mahmud, but his envious treasurer. It shall end well, however. Nasir Lek's message will not leave Mahmud unmoved," said the younger man, who was the Governor of Kohistan, a friend of the Sultan of Ghaznin, and a boundless admirer of Persia's famous poet, Firdusi.

"May Allah bless thy kindness; yea, it shall end well; it is well that things here come to an end,—or with poverty to sting, with oppression to harass, and the dread of the executioner's axe to torture one, life were a hell without redemption. Ah, I have emptied the cup of bitterness to its dregs! But it cannot now last long; my human frame's time of

final crumbling has been nearly reached. May Firdusi's misery be Mahmud's pillow!" cried the poet, turning his liquid eyes heavenward.

By this time the men had ascended to a height of over nine thousand feet above the sea level, and Tehran spread far away, like a patch covered with all kinds of mushrooms. The sun was near the end of his course and the golden flood turned the vast reaches into a magic picture of light and shade, under a dome suffused with rippled waves of translucent purple, crimson, silver and gold. With their faces turned toward the East, the Moslems knelt and lay prostrate in prayer. This done, the escort was ordered to await their lord's return where they stood, and the two men soon disappeared in a labyrinth of crags, rocks, loose bowlders, and heaps of stone, with no vestige of vegetation. Firdusi had the question at his tongue's end, how could a sentient being live in so inhospitable a region, in a temperature so freezing that it chilled him to his marrow? But he said nothing. The cold grew with the dreariness of the surroundings, and

now they plunged into a sea of dense fog, still climbing higher and higher, the younger assisting his older friend. At last Nasir brought forth a horn to which he gave wind. The blast reverberated with appalling effect, followed by a profound silence. There was no answer. Another blast startled the echoes of the mountain a thousandfold, ringing like muffled drums, and lo! there came a note in response,—a shrill note like that of a whistle.

"We are welcome, and thou wilt be rewarded for thy toil, Firdusi," said Nasir.

"He is thy mystery of the Damavant," observed the poet skeptically.

"Thou wilt face a man who might pass for the spirit of this mountain; as to his occult power, thou shalt thyself be judge," suggested Nasir.

"Is one permitted to ask him questions?" inquired Firdusi.

"Ask nothing until his revelations are spread before thee; thou wilt have little to ask. The juggler's art has often amused me, but Almazor's alembic has almost translated me from

one state of being to another.—There he is; say nothing; he knows my purpose, and will read thy mind," said the lord of Kohistan nervously.

Firdusi, looking in vain for the outlines of a human form, almost fell into the arms of a something that wore a cloak, was very long-bearded, very tall, very attenuated and pale as the moon, the pallor being enhanced by a whiteness of hair which rivaled new-fallen snow. The only dark feature in the hermit's face was one glaring eye hemmed in by a cavernous socket, the other orb being sightless and covered with skin like the rest of the countenance.

Almazor could indeed pass as a prince of ghosts rather than a creature held alive by the circulation of warm blood, and his speaking by pantomime added to the awe inspired by his inscrutable nature. He stood in the curve of a semi-circular enclosure before an aperture that was not large enough for a man to enter without crouching low.

Without a salaam or any ceremony, Almazor turned and slipped like a serpent into the gap-

ing hole of the rock, the others following him. It was brighter within than without, although there was nothing in sight to account for the brightness. The nimbleness with which the fleshless hermit ascended and descended steep and winding galleries, bridges, and tunnels, leading now up now down into the core of the mountain, was less surprising than the lightness with which the men behind him kept up the pace, as though carried by a force beyond the law of gravitation. Their impression grew that the top of Damavant could not be very far above them when the speechless guide stopped in a brightly illumined space of considerable size and height, irregular as caves are, but beautified by a long vista, slanting upward not unlike a funnel of polished silver, at the upper end of which shone, in its fullest circumference, the broad disk of the full moon. A stalagmite of pure crystal sparkled in the moonlight like a reflector, affording seats for perhaps a score of people ; at its foot stood the bowl of an unusually large chibouque, its green stem hanging like a snake over the back of the glittering divan, and a box of sandal-wood

completed the equipment of the magic laboratory.

The opening of the sandal-wood box brought to light a strange herb, cut and dried like tobacco, but diffusing a sense-blunting odor; and being put into the fire-bowl of the chibouque and ignited, the mysterious herb filled the space with a golden smoke and a somnolent atmosphere. Mechanically complying with a motion of the hermit's hand, Firdusi seated himself next to the chibouque, turned his eyes in the direction of the moon's shining disk and, before he knew it, had the mouthpiece of the pipe between his lips. As the smoke followed the smoker's breath, and rose in puffs and ringlets above his head, he lost consciousness of his environment, and realized a sense of bodily expansion, as though his frame was undergoing a transmutation from the solid to the ethereal form. At the same time the lunar orb assumed prodigious dimensions, swelling, spreading, and changing from a mottled globe to a continent of glaring peaks and black abysses, its enormous bulk seeming to draw nearer and nearer the beholder, who felt that, by an unaccount-

able process, he was being translated from one world to another. Utterly and willingly helpless, Firdusi allowed himself to be tossed and twirled lightly, and his next sensation was of alighting on massive ground brilliantly illumined.

In his most daring flights of imagination the poet had never dreamed of the possibility of such a sight as the lunar world presented to his eyes. The height he stood upon dwarfed the forest of pointed pinnacles around, and afforded him an insight into numberless pits as black as the surface was dazzling,—if this name be applicable to an endless agglomeration of spires, turrets, crests, rocks, crags, precipices, varied by bottomless abysses, the whole torn, broken, wrenched, twisted by tremendous agencies into most fantastic shapes—a terrific waste of awful confusion and eternal silence. The death of death ruled here supreme. Glass of all shades and no shade; masses of all colors and no color; fissures, clefts and chasms of all forms and no form, with none of the elemental conditions which create and further life, characterized

the appalling desolation. How and wherefore did this come to be? A sea of once molten ores, tossed about and blown upon by interstellar forces, and chilled into iron rigidity while sweeping through a freezing zone, hangs forever in radiant gloom, the celestial mirror of the sun's unebbing light, when his face is turned away from our globe, thought the poet; and his eye swept afar in search of relief from the fierce light not less than from the abysmal deeps buried in darkness.

With the sigh of an uneasy heart, Firdusi looked up to the source of the unendurable effulgence. The blackness of the infinite space on high was intensified by the enormity of the flaming sphere, convulsed by fiery oceans in tempestuous agitation, upshooting, breaking and bursting, like furious billows hurled one against another by battling hurricanes.

While the beholder compared this aspect of the sun with his milder face as seen from the earth, the stormy fire-ball began to sink visibly. Night hurried from the opposite heaven to swallow his last ray. He disappeared, as if

devoured by a monster, leaving no trail to mark his march through the black dome of the universe. Overawed by the stupendous phenomenon, Firdusi closed his eyes in fervent prayer, praising Allah the Most Merciful. A more pleasing sight was another sphere which now rose in distinct outlines above the black horizon, much larger than the moon as seen from below, and as much sweeter, presenting a figured disk of beautiful shadings, zones and fields of color approaching those most familiar to the human eye. How gracious He who gave man that blessed world, said the poet to himself, and feasted his eyes on its configurations, which grew more distinct as the globe rose higher, mildly radiant and sublimely impressive.

There was no possibility of discerning distinctly one thing from another, but Firdusi's poetic fancy endeavored to locate the blue oceans, to recognize the green zones, and trace the mountain ranges and the great deserts. And as the world wherein man is king and slave, saint and sinner, angel and demon, happy and wretched, grew more and more

glorious in ascent, the suffering bard, feeling in his grief the woes of the race, allowed his tears to flow before speech came to his relief.

"The Universe is thy secret, Power Divine, but O, for that peace which dwells with Thee alone, that sight which reveals the great mystery, and the life which knows no beginning, no withering, and no end! Who am I, and wherefore thrown on that shore of time, that isle of space, to struggle with a myriad myriads of my like, toiling and sighing, with death as the dark end of a dark nightmare? If man must perish like the worm, then happy the worm who knows not his misery. Alas, in shreds scattered are the golden webs of hope here. Who knows that my dreams of Paradise are less illusory? That splendid world has much to sweeten life made bitter by the serpent in the human breast. Why is man so akin to the brute? Am I a spirit fallen, sent yonder to atone, and by atonement to be redeemed? Or am I risen from things below the worm to my present state, and progressing toward a higher,—ay, perchance the highest life and form, like Him who traced my path-

way through the vale of sorrow and the shadow of death? Or are the worm and I but infinitesimal incidents in endless time and space, called forth by a cruel fate to wriggle in agony and sink into everlasting night? Power Divine, forbid this black thought from blighting the last flower of hope, lest chaos swallow what is bright and sane in this little world of mine."

As though responsive to the mood of the bard, the terrestrial globe began to undergo a phenomenal change. Lurid and livid hues overspread its luminous shadings with frightful velocity, rushing in like an ever-thickening pall, and giving the appearance of a red ball engulfed in a cloud of cinders, with black space as the background. But the moon, although obscured by the darkening of her superior luminary, did not remain in total obscurity. The reason of which became manifest to Firdusi the moment he sent his eyes elsewhere to account for the shimmer. What he beheld was too much for him to contemplate without a shudder of reverential awe, a consciousness of nothingness in face of the sublime eternal; and yet it was but a glimpse

of the starry heavens. For every blinking star visible to the eye from sublunar ground there shone now a score of constellations, clusters of wheeling spheres, the nearest of which exceeded the rainbow in circumference, transcending it in brilliancy. The interstellar darkness acted as a frame to set off the glowing galaxies, so that the empyrean suggested the idea of an ethereal tree, spreading its sun-bespangled crown throughout immensity.

And the vast grew vaster, and the depths deeper, and the wonders multiplied, as host after host emerged from the bosom of infinity, wheeling and circling in celestial grandeur, stirring boundless ether with soul-enravishing strains. Firdusi's great heart thawed in felicity; from his eyes rolled the tear of rapture, not unmixed with a blunted sense of pain, springing from a lingering apprehension that it was all but a vain vision. To his ear the music of the spheres spelt man's inscrutable destiny, his real woes, his elusive hopes, his unrealized dreams, and his dark end. But there was a healing solace, an intuitive appeasement in the heavenly exhibition, so that

the poet, realizing the balm of faith, muttered resignedly:

"Power Divine, infinite as are Thy eternal glories, even I am interwoven in Thy impenetrable design, whatever Thy purpose. In Thy perfection Thou hast created no being to be forever imperfect, or to utterly perish after a ray of Thy intelligence has once irradiated his mind."

Firdusi's lips trembled as he lisped this conviction. His hand moved instinctively toward his eyes, which were veiled by a dimness that made everything swim vaguely before his vision. The sense of coming down headlong from another world made his weak frame writhe in convulsions of horror. When he opened his eyes he found himself in the arms of his friend, Nasir.

Great as was the poet's creative faculty, it required some time for him to recall his original situation, especially since the cave presented nothing of its previous features. There was neither a bright vista nor a moon to look at, but a dingy hole out of which they had to grope their way, with no hermit to lead them.

When they issued from the mountain's mystery it was broad daylight; they had stayed therein the whole night. Soon the attendants answered the call of Nasir's horn, and the descent was made in perfect silence. They arrived before the gates of the palace simultaneously with a courier, who, springing from his saddle, respectfully delivered a package to the ruler of Kohistan. "It is Mahmud's answer to my appeal in thy behalf, Firdusi," observed Nasir with a beaming countenance, "and I know not the Sultan of Ghaznin if the devil triumphed this time."

They were no sooner within the Governor's residence than Nasir broke the seal of the message to learn its purport, and he read as follows:

"In the name of the only true, most merciful God! From Mahmud of Ghaznin to his friend Nasir Lek of Kohistan, in behalf of Abul Casim Mansur Firdusi. Peace and friendly greetings. God alone is great. May truth and mercy prevail.

"As thy soul hath spoken, so hath my heart answered, moved by the pleadings of

exhausting ascent," said the host sympathetically.

"Let me, I pray thee, abstain from taking food until the craving demands it, lest it choke me, being overfull," replied the poet with ill-suppressed emotion.

Having appeased his own hunger by a meal served by slaves, Nasir surprised his friend by asking him in a tone less reproachful than anxious, "So, have the good tidings not broken thy gloom, O, Firdusi, nor the mystery of the Damavant added to thy spiritual wealth, thy ethereal dreams?"

"Thou art good, and I ought to be happy in my magnanimous friend, but happiness ever frowned at my courting, and fled never to return. Friend, I stand on the brink of my grave, with precious years wasted in undeserved disgrace, unmitigated wretchedness.—Ah, and that vision revealed to me in the recesses of the Damavant! If thou knowest its nature thou canst draw thy conclusions," returned Firdusi deeply moved, adding: "Thy hermit is more than thou dreamest of him."

"That is what I looked for thee to say; but

Almazor is a secret bequest of my father, and that horn of mine is the only signal he will respond to; otherwise he is not to be found, and Tehran knows no more of him than thou didst before I led thee thither. He is the mystery of the Damavant, more ghost than man, living no one knows how, a spirit among spirits, unaffected by hunger, thirst or cold," explained Nasir with impressive earnestness.

"A great secret and a precious heirloom all in one," mused Firdusi.

"Thou hast said it; my father's father blew the horn I sounded yester-night, and saw peradventure the things thou and I have seen," continued Nasir.

"Those are sights to unhinge reason," asserted the poet.

"What thou hast seen is thy secret, O, Firdusi, and thou hast been vouchsafed no more than thy spirit can assimilate. Strange were the words thou hast spoken in the trance caused by the smoke of the mysterious herb, as it passed through thy system. That herb crops up where no earthly plant can exist, in a spring which is half liquid and half vapor,

warm when everything around is frozen, and cold when the sun's heat beats against it like the deadly simoom. Invisible in daylight, the herb betrays itself at rare intervals in the dead of the darkest night by its phosphorescent nature. From my father I have it that, infused into the human frame in any manner, the mind will see whatever it is capable of grasping. Under its influence I had a glimpse of paradise, a clime and a region impossible to describe," imparted the host confidingly.

A transient smile flitted over the poet's countenance as his eyes met those of his communicative friend, and then rang a voice deep, sonorous, fluent and suave, conjuring before the entranced hearer sights appalling to think of, illuminated horrors rolling in ether, a world of dismal deserts, dead mountains and black abysses: petrified chaos grinning in the face of a burning and seething sun. But when, passing from the lunar desolations to the empyrean hosts, the master of epic melody gave full play to his inspired genius, bidding the stars to march forth as he had seen them before the spirit's eye, Nasir fell into an ecstasy of

delight, sinking on his knees, weeping, and kissing the hands of the white-headed singer he so loved and revered, and crying: "And all this fails to make thee happy, divine Firdusi!"

In this enthusiastic exclamation of his devoted admirer the poet heard a reproach. Is not faith, blind faith, preferable to endowments which engender doubt? He had had his share of fame and favor, but proved too frail to accept trials with the resignation enjoined by Islam. Revolt against Allah's unsearchable decree is unworthy of the true believer. Zarathustra lay prostrate in adoration before the sun, because to his mind the Universe reveals nothing grander as a symbol of divine Omnipotence; how much deeper ought he to be impressed who has witnessed the sublime progress of a billion suns in the midst of their countless planets and satellites?

"Thy words are not meant as a reprimand, yet am I startled at what they imply," spoke Firdusi in a deliberate tone. "Even at my age theories may be revised, and new conclusions reached. Though fire-worshippers

are the heroes of my *Shah-Namah*, my faith is that of the Prophet. But alas! how banish doubt which steals into one's head like the demon of insanity? If we must have a theory let us build on the postulate that life and death point to harmonizing relations. The self-evident relation of the tiniest blade of grass to the great sun is not clearer than that of the rain-drop to the cloud and the ocean, and both prove that of the human soul to the universal Spirit. If the outer world reveals to us little more than the form of things, a glimpse into their inner nature is granted us in our inner world of thought and inspiration. When land and sea, mountain and valley, field and desert, lake and river, tree and blossom, fish, brute, bird and insect,—when the elements of earth and the stars of heaven, are recognized as the visible manifestations of an impenetrable design, with man as the crowning work in this nether creation, and God as the All-in-All, the All-above-All throughout the Universe, then does the soul pass from her inner world into the supernatural domain, inspiration passes into revelation, and the

mind's peace and the heart's felicity insure a foretaste of heaven; the dissonance of doubt succumbs to the harmony of faith, and the rain-drop, long lost in the dark cracks and crevices of the rugged rock, bounds forth in a crystal spring, rushes into the rivulet, the river, eager to mix with the ocean's vast."

Whether Nasir understood his friend's metaphysics or not, he was the last to question a man's ideas, whose superior wisdom he never doubted. Moslem friendship is kindred to Bedouin hospitality, and Nasir, who had received the poet with all the marks of distinction, made arrangements to signalize his departure in royal form. After a feast given in his honor to the notables of the province, the famous bard, mounted on a fine dromedary, followed by another one loaded with valuable presents, and escorted by a magnificent cavalcade, issued hopefully from Tehran's gate, accompanied by his loyal friend.

"If Allah's mercy grants me the joys of paradise, I will pray that Nasir Lek share them with me, unless thy meed be above

mine, who am less generous than thou," were Firdusi's last words of gratitude, addressed to his magnanimous host.

On reaching Tus, the place of his birth, Firdusi found that the Sultan's promised gold had not arrived, and he was greatly troubled, lest Mahmud's apologies were intended as a snare spread for his destruction. His apprehension was not allayed by hearing incidentally a child in the street lisp a verse of the pungent satire in which he taunts Mahmud as the base-born son of slaves. The trend of the lines was, that had that potentate's progenitors been of noble blood, instead of cheating him of the prize he had promised for the *Shah-Namah*, he would have set a crown of gold on his aged head.

Heart-wringing self-compassion moved the decrepit man to tears. His grievance is the plaint of Iran, breathed by innocents into the ears of sympathetic mothers. Once more he lived through the fearful moments of his life; the hours of that night when daybreak was to see him trampled under the feet of Mahmud's elephants, because he had resented the Sul-

tan's meanness in sending him sixty thousand pieces of silver instead of gold, *dirhems* in lieu of *dinars*, as agreed; the moment when, fleeing from the wrath of the tyrant, he sought a refuge at Mazenderan, where Kabous, the prince of Jorjan, durst not harbor him for fear of the implacable persecutor; and that most painful of hours when El Kader Billah, the Caliph of Baghdad, at first delighted with the genius of the fugitive, asked him to depart when Mahmud of Ghaznin demanded his extradition. Whelmed with grief, the broken man returned to his daughter's home to die in her arms, resigned to the inscrutable decree of destiny.

Just as Firdusi's body was carried out through one gate of Tus, the camels which bore the Sultan's gold entered the city through another. His daughter refused to accept it, but an aged relative remembered his cherished wish to see his native place improved by public works, especially a healthy and plentiful supply of water. To comply with the poet's generous wish, the treasure was taken and invested for the benefit of his lament-

ing townsmen, whose descendants have during the successive centuries continued to celebrate the passing of Iran's immortal singer.

THE GODS IN EXILE.

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THE year 1492 was a dark one for the sons of Shem. The fall of Granada and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain are events more generally commemorated than the equally dramatic episode which wound up with the tragic death of Bajazid, the dashing caliph of Damascus, surnamed Yildirim —"the thunderbolt." At no time of the year is the Moslem world so deeply stirred as during the month Shawall, the fifteenth day of which marks the official opening of the great yearly pilgrimage to Mecca. The Haj is the name of the leading caravan which carries the Sultan's gift for Mohammed's shrine, that holds the black stone given by an angel to Abraham. No animal in creation has so many devout eyes concentrated on its unbeautiful outlines

as the dromedary which conveys, under a canopy of green silk, the gorgeously embroidered covering for the walls of the Kabah. This *Kiswa*, as it is called, is made of black brocade, and its magnificent golden border spells divine utterance culled from the gems of the Koran. Exceeding it in costliness is a smaller curtain sent along for the Kabah's doors which swing in a frame of silver and gold.

Even in our days that train starts from Damascus with great ceremony, is accompanied by the municipal dignitaries led by the Pasha, and escorted by a regiment in military pomp. No Moslem eye will miss the opportunity of witnessing the *muhmil*, or silken canopy, as it swings on the camel's back, shielding the sacred vesture of the most sacred of Islam's fanes, so that along the line of the procession the immense concourse of the faithful throng every available spot, from the terraced roof down to the gutters of the ill-paved, sinuous lanes.

Such is the religious signal for hundreds of thousands to start for the centre of Moslem

devotion from every quarter and corner as far as the crescent is revered, to fulfil the duty of adoring the object of the Prophet's worship. For he who has kissed that heavenly stone is not alone cleansed of all his sins, but is thereafter distinguished by the surname of Hajj.

The departure of the Haj in the year of the discovery of the New World was one of unprecedented commotion. It was known that a great army was being concentrated and hurriedly drilled, and that Bajazid was on the point of taking the field himself, having gained signal triumphs in his repeated wars with Christian powers. That he appeared in his great mosque on the day of the Haj, and, surrounded by his bodyguard, followed the muhmil out of the city's confines, was interpreted as an ominous sign of impending danger. The Caliph's countenance was scrutinized with great anxiety by those who caught sight of it, and somber deductions passed from lip to lip. As if to confirm the popular apprehensions, as Bajazid re-entered the city, a yelling saint, looking more like a satyr than a human being, emerged nobody knew

whence, and, planting himself in the way of the white steed which carried the Commander of the faithful, cried: "Bajazid, Bajazid, the stars are against thee. Woe! Woe! Damascus! I see thee and thy sister cities swim in blood, thy treasures plundered, thy beauty rifled, thy daughters outraged, with none to avenge thee! Woe! Woe! Woe!" A terrible frown darkened the brows of the hitherto invincible Caliph, but nobody dared lay a hand on the prophet of evil, who was allowed to lose himself in the next grove unmolested. The saint is only an instrument in the hand of Allah, and before the people had sufficiently recovered from their consternation to exchange a word about the fateful prophecy, a courier came tearing along the straight way of the city; another one was close behind, and another, their horses panting for breath. These events were followed by a sleepless night and feverish activity in the palace. Couriers were speeding to and fro; regiments were moving; batteries were mounted, and the graying dawn saw the Sultan at the head of a division marching out of his citadel never to return.

From the hand of fate Bajazid was to drink the dregs of the bitter cup. Like stubble before the fire, everything withered before the all-engulfing devastation of Timur's unconquerable host. Having swept nations and races before him, that celebrated Tartar conqueror made short work of Bajazid's mighty army. In the province of Angora host encountered host, the Caliph sustained a crushing defeat, his army was shattered, and the dreaded "thunderbolt" was himself among the prisoners in the hands of a merciless foe. With other cities, beautiful Damascus experienced the wrath of the Tartar's beastly nature. An indiscriminate slaughter of the population was followed by pillage, and whatever could not be plundered and taken off was delivered to the flames. The Caliph's fate was sad in the extreme. Dragged along by the conqueror as a trophy in an iron palanquin, which looked more like a cage than aught else, death, more gracious than the savage Tartar, finally delivered Bajazid from a life of humiliation and torture.

The wizard who had foretold the downfall

of the Caliph and the ruin of populous cities was never hereafter seen within the broad circuit of Damascus, a region exceeding in the exuberance of its semi-tropic verdure and panoramic landscape the beauty of Granada's famous valley in its palmy days of Moorish rule. The fatalistic principle of Islam precludes spying into the inscrutable decrees of Allah, whose will is fate from which there is neither appeal nor escape. Why then waste a moment in identifying an oracle whose prophecies pass through him as water passes through a pipe? It is impious to search into the unsearchable.

There were two young men on the scene, however, whose antecedents account for that mad impetuosity with which they stormed onward in pursuit of the oracular saint as soon as it was possible for them to elude the eyes of the crowd. One was Damon Mianolis, a young Greek, who had inherited from his father an avidity for the occult science of astrology; the other was Selim Ebn Asa, a youthful Moslem, who had enabled Damon to witness in disguise the departure of the Haj.

Damon's father was a physician, but had a secret laboratory, and had spent a fortune in attempts at fathoming the mysteries of alchemy and astrology. Damon had been early initiated into those mystic arcana, had learned to cast the horologue, but was wofully disappointed in the matter of extracting gold from other substances, and gave up the hope of ever discovering the elixir of life. The physician's death had put his son in possession of an extensive practice among his fellow-Christians, and Selim's friendship was due to the Moslem's ambition to acquire a knowledge of French, which Damon spoke fluently.

The intimate relation of the two young men led to free discussions of the merits of their respective creeds, with the result that each one believed a little more in his friend's and a little less in his own scheme of salvation. The heavenly city built of gold and precious stones, with twelve gates and glittering streets, through which flows the river of life, bordered on its banks by the tree of life, which bears twelve sorts of fruits and leaves of healing virtue, was pointed to by Damon as the pat-

tern of Mohammed's paradise of which Selim made much in his effort to convert his friend. Selim meant to astonish Damon by referring to those pavilions of pearls in which the houris dwell retired, each pearl sixty miles in dimension; but was met by the even more astonishing promise of St. John that "the days shall come when there shall be vines which shall have each ten thousand branches, and every one of these branches shall have ten thousand lesser branches, and every one of these branches shall have ten thousand twigs, and every one of the twigs shall have ten thousand clusters of grapes, and every one of these clusters shall bear ten thousand grapes, and every one of these grapes being pressed shall yield two hundred and seventy-five gallons of wine, and when a man shall take hold of one of those sacred branches, another one shall cry out 'I am the better branch; take me and bless the Lord.'"*

This left the youthful Moslem little to boast of in the concern of paradisial blessedness, and he was totally overwhelmed by a vivid

* *Cf.* Irenæus, Book V., Chap. 33.

picture of Dante's elaboration of hell. What impressed Selim, however, most profoundly was Damon's familiarity with the heavenly configurations, and his pretended ability to read future events. The fact is that the late Mianolis had shortly before his death predicted Bajazid's overthrow and captivity, and Selim had received a hint of the prediction. No sooner, therefore, had the saint's lamentation fallen on their ears than the young men exchanged a significant look, and the next instant both were on the track of the retreating soothsayer. In but a very few minutes Selim realized the impossibility of his overtaking the fleeing man, whose feet scarcely touched the turf; but not so Damon, who taxed his energies to their uttermost to keep the winged fugitive in sight. Not a living soul crossed them as they hurried onward, the saint leading through a maze of entangling thickets on pathways of his own,—the other following almost out of breath, determined not to give up the chase.

In this way miles had been traversed before Damon noticed that they were at the foot of Anti-Lebanon, and that Selim was not behind

him. The ascent had to be made, or the game would have been lost in a moment. From an elevation of several hundred feet Damon's eye was fascinated by the superb view of Damascus, set in a garland of groves, bushes and gardens, distance enhancing the charm of the exquisite panorama. Along the banks of Abana, in the heart of a sea of verdure, rose a grand vision of terraced roofs, surmounted here and there by swelling domes, towering minarets, tipped with gilded crescents, glittering like burnished scythes from the thick foliage of blooming parks. An area of thirty miles in circuit spread like a dream, with a variance of grouping and shading, and a charm of blended tints such as are rarely vouchsafed to the eye even in regions of renowned picturesqueness.

Damon had never before seen Damascus in such a wreath of glory; but the few seconds the sight exacted of his attention frustrated his efforts to locate the wizard's retreat, who had disappeared as though dissolved in air. At the same time a feeling of exhaustion rendered a further ascent impossible, coupled with a som-

nolence which stole and gained upon the youth, until, succumbing to the spell, he lay stretched on the grass under a tree, lost in oblivion. Re-appearing on the scene as suddenly as he had vanished, the haggard, half-naked wizard waved his crooked staff over the sleeper's head, drew a circle around him, pointed southward, and vanished as before. On returning to consciousness Damon bit his tongue to assure himself that he was really awake; his hand dashed across his eyes,—it was no vision. He felt deathly cold, although his touch left no doubt that he was robed in fur, his head, hands and feet covered by the same material. It was night, and he in an air-ship, under stars he had never seen ere this, and sweeping with great speed through a world of mountains of ice and frozen seas, an icy desolation buried in dense fogs. Before him sat the controlling aeronaut, white as frost and silent as death; to his right sat a female in black, with eyes closed and the countenance of a corpse; to his left sat none else but the saint as he had seen him in the street of Damascus, with no evidence of being

in the least affected by the intense cold. Damon suspecting that it was a dream within a dream, closed his eyes tightly to continue his slumber when he heard a voice addressing him thus: "Son of Mianolis the Wise, know that thou art in the chariot of Auster, hurrying toward the great ice regions of the south with me, thy sire's friend, and this dame, the Witch of Endor, on whose grave thou hadst taken thy rest this last day, thus disturbing her spirit that soars over the tomb of the body which held it when alive. Evil would have befallen thee but for my interposition in thy behalf, and I am indebted to thy father for revelations in the stars and in the realms of nature, which give me foresight and power over spirits. What thou shalt see to-night was the awe of thy ancestors and of those who gave rise to the mightiest progeny on earth; but hold thy breath, lest the frost congeal thy blood, and be not alarmed even if mountains quake and oceans burst," was the wizard's reassuring information.

Even before the last word had been spoken an enormous column of lurid flame and livid

smoke upshot from the heart of an immense mountain, and in a continuous flow lost itself in the clouds, a deluge of fire ascending and descending with the tremendous crack and reverberation of thunder. "That southernmost volcano shall mark for generations to come the extreme limit of human penetration into the forbidding regions of ice; the other facing it to eastward burns no more, but is likewise an insurmountable barrier set by nature against the intrusion of man into regions reserved for the dethroned gods. They shall in future years be respectively known and shunned as 'Mount Erebus' and 'Mount Terror'" volunteered the wizard as an explanation, but further mystifying the already confused aeronaut. On the highest peak of Terror the chariot alighted, and a puff of Auster's breath dissolved the mists around a group of crystal palaces, trimmed with gold, roofed with silver, clustering around an all-outshining, sky-towering edifice reaching up to an ethereal height, overarched by a blazing span of transcendental rainbowed glories, blending into golden haze below, and an indefinable silvery twilight

above.—"Asgard," were the first syllables uttered by the Witch of Endor.

Yes, it was Odin's celestial Court* where, from his throne, he surveyed heaven and earth, and yon was He exalted high above all others, on his shoulders the ravens Hugin and Munin, who, in ancient times, daily traversed the world to report the happenings among the mortal race, and at his feet the two wolves Friki and Geri, whom Odin feeds with the meat set before him, mead alone being sufficient for him who feeds all creatures.

Overpowering as was the presence of Odin

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* In his narrative Malek, from whom this tale is derived, contrasted the Greek gods with those "barbaric gods of the north, who dwell in twilight, build their palace of the rainbow, hunt the wild boar, and fling winged thunder at their adversaries," and the function he assigned to each power seemed to leave no doubt that he referred to Odin's Court, so that I have supplied the names that he did not use. The Orient contains many surprises, and it appealed to me as one of them to find a Mohammedan Parsee familiar with Norse mythology as a tradition of the East. Malek, however, always claimed that the Parsees are the best educated people in the East.

on his throne, another spectacle forced itself on Damon's vision. In front of Valhalla's portal, an entrance as wide as the entire hall, a desperate struggle was raging between redoubtable combatants, who struck at each other with appalling fury. The broad arena was already strewed with numerous bodies cut to pieces. A relentless frenzy appeared to have seized those who were still engaged in the exterminating feud, while the gods looked on with complacence, as though the deathful affair was a mere tournament. When the battle was over there was but one hero left, and he bleeding from many wounds. Presently there came a blast from a horn in Valhalla, which sent a breath of animation through the bulky bodies of the slaughtered. Their wounds closed, their severed limbs knitted and healed, their eyes opened, their frames quivered, straightened and pulsated with life. They rose, picked up their weapons, and straightway repaired to the festive hall where throngs of shining elves attended on them with food and drink. Damon knew then that these were the immortal heroes

who, having fallen in battle, were permitted to dwell among the gods, partaking of the meat of Shrimnir, the ever-reviving boar, and of the mead of the she-goat Heidrun. What looked like a fierce battle was simply an amusement.

The feast was rudely interrupted by a note of alarm sounded by Heimdall, the sleepless sentinel of Odin's Court. Heimdall's business is to make the round of the borders of heaven to prevent intruders from ascending by the way of Bifrost, that is the bridge built of the rainbow's light which links earth to Odin's ethereal Court. He is especially anxious to intercept the mischievous giants who are ever on the alert to annoy the powers of Asgard. As Heimdall's ears are so fine that he hears growing of the grass and of the wool on a sheep's back, it is no wonder that his warning of impending danger startled the gods. Thialfi, Thor's inseparable attendant and the swiftest messenger of Asgard, was forthwith despatched northward, whence, according to Heimdall's information, the storm was coming, while the gods and the heroes made ready for

the emergency, whatever it might be. Invincible Thor, whose terrific hammer, Miölnir, splits mountains, and returns to the hand of the god when hurled against a foe, girded himself with his belt, which redoubles his terrors, and put on his iron gloves to render the shock of his mallet irresistible.

They soon beheld Thialfi returning all astounded, with tidings which made Thor's veins swell with rage.—"A burning sun, O great Odin, accompanied by a host of gods, goddesses, and their dependents, carry with them hitherward a city of supernal palaces, and will be upon us before thy will can be heard in council," reported Thialfi. Almost simultaneous with these words fell the first beam of a golden flood on the brilliant domes and towers of Asgard. Night fled to the darkest recesses of Antarctic gloom; the snow softened; the icebergs glittered like mountains of jewels; whale, dolphin and sea-lion gamboled with delight, but the black elves, who dread the sun, were turned by myriads into stones. Of vegetable life there was not as much as a blade of grass to be seen; not a

withered leaf, nor a dry shrub to greet the radiant orb. In his all-knowing wisdom Odin exclaimed: "It is the Olympian Thunderer who comes this way; if it means peace we shall open our hall to welcome him; should it mean war, it will be thy task, Thor, to drive him hence with ruin." Quick as thought did Phœbus suspend his blazing chariot in mid-heaven, eastward of Mount Erebus, which, crowned with light and glory, was instantaneously turned into an Olympus by the fiat of creative powers. Phœbus caused the earth to thaw; Pan called forth a garden of Hesperian richness; Ceres conjured up a crop of golden grain where glaciers had been slowly grinding their way for numberless cycles; the fire-spitting Erebus smiled like May, garlanded by Flora, every god and goddess contributing his or her share to create an Elysium in the most dreary of ice-buried deserts.

In less time than it takes to tell it, Jupiter established himself in a manner which left in Odin no doubt that the whilom sovereign of Olympus had come to stay. Thor burned for action, but Odin restrained his impetuous son,

reminding him that if he had the rock-blasting mallet to hurl, so had the Olympian chief something to send in return, which it might be wise to avoid if possible. First the most guileful schemer of Odin's Court was to be employed to ascertain the real purpose of the thunderer's arrival; and this was the malicious Loki, one of the hostile giants, who had succeeded in securing a foothold in Asgard.

Loki's nature may be judged by his three offspring; they are the wolf Fenris, the Midgard serpent, and Hela, that is death. Fenris could not be allowed to roam at large; but to chain him was a problem the gods alone could solve. Every kind of chain having been tried in vain, the mountain spirits were required to fashion one that should not yield like cobweb to the teeth of the horrid monster. It was made of the beards of women, the noise of the cat's paw, the breath of fishes, the roots of stones, the spittle of birds, and the sensitiveness of bears; it was as pleasant to the touch as a silken cord, and was named Glupnir. With this fetter on his neck Fenris was rendered harmless. His twin, the Mid-

gard serpent, is so enormous that her length is thrown around the earth like a belt, she holding her tail in her mouth. Hela dwells in Elvidnir, a black hall in dark Niffleheim. She feeds on hunger, cuts her food with starvation, decks her bed with misery, employs slowness as her maid, delay as her servant; her threshold is precipice, her tapestries burning anguish. The father of this precious triplet was not a little pleased to be thus honored with the important embassy to the sovereign of the Olympian dynasty, especially since the message was but little short of an ultimatum. Loki's mind was not of a frame to be surprised at anything, or intimidated by any display of might; but the stream of blinding light he had to face, as he turned toward the point of his destination, caused his eyes to water, wholly unused as he was to a splendor which made Asgard's rainbow pale, as does the moon before the rising sun. Whether it was for a purpose or by chance, Phœbus darted his rays with piercing penetration, focussing them on the visage of Odin's envoy, and his chariot, a master

work of Hephæstus, forged of glittering metal, and set with resplendent gems, moved in an orbit with an ever-widening periphery. Winged Mercury met Loki half way, bade him stop by a wave of his Caduceus, and required him to give an account of his mission. Satisfied with the answer, Mercury led the way to the gate of clouds guarded by the goddess Seasons, and Loki soon found himself in the radiant palace of Jupiter than which there could be nothing loftier and more glorious under the stars. Here the deities meet in council in the assembly hall of their chief, and here they indulge the divine feast of ambrosia and nectar served by the ineffably lovely goddess Hebe, while Apollo delights the immortals with the ravishing strains of his lyre, accompanied by the song of the nine Muses.

Ushered into the awful presence of the Olympian thunderer, Loki beheld himself in the midst of a galaxy of deities, whose various attributes and aspects would have astonished him had they not been eclipsed by the overpowering grandeur of the son of Saturnus, who, enthroned in supernal majesty, with the

Ægis, shining like the sun before him, and his thunder-speeding eagle next to him, formed a striking contrast to Odin's dimmer environments.

At the sight of Loki, Apollo struck his lyre, the Muses joined their heavenly voices to swell the melody, and Hebe served to all the food and drink of the gods, including Odin's envoy in the divine conviviality. But ambrosia and nectar affected Loki's palate so differently from the meat of the boar Shrimnir and the mead of the she-goat Heidrun that the first quaff of the new beverage made his facial muscles contract and distend in so ludicrous a fashion that the vast hall resounded with the laughter of the Olympians. Loki did not like the idea of being made the butt of ridicule, but, though stung to the quick, joined in the merriment at his expense, there being no hope for vengeance thus far. Required to state the purport of his message, he began thus:

"It is Odin's wish that peace prevail betwixt his Court and thine, O mighty Chief, and I am sent to remind thee, that when Alfa-

dur had doomed thy rule and his in Midgard, a new order having risen with a new time, the compact was that thou withdraw to the fields swept by Boreas, the Valkyrior kindling the north lights for thy benefit, and he, undeterred by severer cold and longer night, should settle in this drearier end of earth, where Day returns but for a double month, allowing Night and Frost to rule supreme. What means thy coming hither with such consuming heat, such pomp as make Odin's bleak retreat unbearable, unless he strive to hold by force what is his by treaty? In substance this is Odin's message. As guests he welcomes thee and thine with all Valhalla has to entertain, and honors powers akin to him in weal and woe, who had tasted the bitters of dethronement and exile. But if thy purpose be to fix a permanent abode within the bounds of Odin's hitherto undisputed empire, war will be the outcome; and war with Asgard means chaos and the end."

The thunderer shook his locks; his eagle's eye flashed fire. Among the superior gods the face of Mars glowed like a meteor. Minerva

assumed a menacing air, and the others gave evidence of a stern determination to go to the bitter end in whatever part they were able to sustain the right and dignity of their challenged head. But Jupiter, inclined toward conciliation if possible, dismissed Loki with earnest mien, promising his answer should reach Odin forthwith. And forthwith Mercury was at Loki's heels, and proceeded with him to Asgard, where Odin gave ear to Jupiter's reply thus conveyed.

"Great Odin, the cloud-compelling power who wields the thunderbolt, but whose old sovereignty has been lamentably curtailed, deplores his condition and thine. True, when the empire over Midgard had to be abandoned in favor of Alfadur's anointed, the extremities of earth alone afforded refuge from the universal spread of those hateful inspirations which, like a deluge, submerged the better world,—synagogue, church, or mosque supplanting those pantheons of art, poetry and beauty, which, in the golden age of dream and fable, song, dance and free love, made man as happy as an unbridled child. When

the time had come for our stern trials, it is remembered that, to render our banishment bearable, thou hast benignly agreed to let the Olympian dynasty retreat northward of the habitable world, thou and thine being more seasoned to endure the severer rigors of this inclement zone. But whither flee from the ever-swelling might of the cross and the crescent? Not satisfied with the conquest of blessed Midgard, their votaries dare penetrate the very extremes of the frigid north, and the cross may be seen where neither wolf nor vulture can breathe. Yea, the western hemisphere, hitherto unknown to the world, is being discovered, and ere long will bristle with the spires of a myriad churches. This extreme alone seems forever barred against the intrusion of man, its terrors bringing death to him;—night, frost and sterility are here in league against mortal flesh. Necessity forced upon our father the resolution to seek once more a new home where, undisturbed by the detestable symbols of new creeds, we may continue with as much comfort as powers inalienable insure for us. Jupiter sends thee peace,

O, mighty Odin, not that he shrinks from war, or heeds threats, but because of his benign temper—unless provoked, when his wrath would prove too much even for the giants on whom Asgard has a watchful eye. For it is he who made Saturnus disgorge his progeny, and holds him chained in the deeps of Erebus."

Mercury's bold language came near to costing him his head. Thor was restrained with difficulty by his father from sending his hammer against the brazen front of Jupiter's messenger, who was, however, allowed to depart unmolested. There was great commotion in Valhalla, and Odin sent his last word to the intruders requiring them to vacate the invaded heights forthwith, or Asgard would proceed to expel them by force. Thialfi imparted this warning to the Olympians and was dismissed with scorn. Heimdall's horn, Giallar, summoned all the Gods and heroes to battle, while Thor held his mallet in readiness to do fearful execution.

Odin's terrific frown was the signal given for the engagement; it isolated the hostile encampment, giving it the appearance of an illu-

mined island in an ocean of dense night. The moments of suspense were being utilized on both sides to call in and muster all the reserves available. Nobody was happier than the mischievous Loki, who was charged to communicate by the roots of the Ygdrasil tree with the inhabitants of Jotunheim, it being the place where those prodigious giants live, the glove of one of whom Thor had once mistaken for a cavern wherein he spent a night, and was disturbed in his sleep by the snoring of the colossus that shook him like an earthquake.

Should those Jotuns be slow in coming, Loki was to rouse Ymir from his rest, Ymir the terrific giant Frost, whose blood is the seas, whose body forms the earth, whose bones are the mountains, whose skull is the heavens, whose brains are the clouds and what they discharge in the shape of rain or snow, and whose eyebrows supplied the material for the making of Midgard, the habitable portion of the globe. Ymir sleeps under the Ygdrasil tree whose branches extend to every quarter of the universe, while its three roots connect Asgard with Niffleheim and

Jotunheim. Ymir's disturbed slumbers make the earth quake and shudder; his awaking would bring about the end of things. Loki's malice had never been more gratified, he having thus far been an unwelcome presence among the gods of Asgard, who had even once gone to the trouble of slaying him for treason to Baldur; but Loki had another life to spare, and here he was bustling, busier than ever before.

Neither were they on Erebus idle. The response to Odin's threatening scowl was an intensified light and such a heat as began to dissolve whatever had remained frozen as stone since Time outspread his wings. Phœbus assumed the terrors of a bursting hell, so that whatever life there was in the sea buried itself deep under its surface. With a due appreciation of his dreadful adversaries, Jupiter arrayed himself in his most appalling panoply, and called on Tartarus to bring to light the pack of Titans prominent among whom were Cottus, Briareus and Gyes, each one having a hundred hands and fifty heads, well known as the subduers of Saturnus, who

indulged the unpaternal habit of feasting on his own offspring. Useless to add, the other Olympians were prepared for the fray, but they waited for the aggressive deed to come from Asgard.

It came like a dart of lightning. Enraged by the consuming heat, Thor aimed a fatal blow at the sun's fiery steeds, hoping to shatter at one stroke the entire team. With its unfailing accuracy Miölnir struck the glowing chariot. Phœbus had a narrow escape, holding tightly the reins; the horses reared wildly, bleeding from many wounds, which closed, however, by virtue of their deathless substance. But as the mallet, by its nature, returned to Thor's grasp, the god roared like a hundred lions; it was a red-hot mass of metal and could not be handled before another fling had passed it through a fathom's depth of a glacier's icy bed. By the time Thor was ready to renew his experiment he felt himself lifted off his feet and hurled headlong into an abyss back of Asgard. Such was the effect of a lightning bolt sent by Jupiter's hand, who had ascended the azurean height of his citadel

whence he caused an ominous thunder-cloud to overshadow the Court of Odin. Though dazed by the blasting shock and the fall, Thor was on his feet, and from a cliff, which he quickly ascended, winged his hammer with unerring precision against the cloud-enshrouded tower of Erebus. Miölnir was met half way by another fulmination of the Olympian thunderer, and the collision of the missiles reverberated like the crack of doom.

Not less fierce was the engagement of the other powers on both sides, who, without deploying into battle array, strove with prodigious might, the one stunning or hurting the other. Malicious Loki, hugely amused to see the whilom invincible Thor wheel through the air and land ignominiously in a chasm, assumed the colossal proportions of the giant race to which he virtually belonged, making effective use of his enormous limbs. Having picked out Mars as his target, he aimed an iceberg at the Olympian war-dog who was inflicting terrible punishment on the gods and heroes of Asgard; but Neptune was at hand with a tremendous billow of tepid water

warmed by Phœbus; it struck the frozen mass, deflecting it from its fatal course, so that there was at once a great splash and a harmless crash.

The battle continued to rage along the line, the elements of fire, water, wind and earth being wielded with whelming impetuosity. Between Thor and Jupiter the duel was incessant, with no turn in favor of Odin's most redoubtable combatant. In the general confusion Loki threw himself with a force on the enemy's flank, endeavoring thus to attack the gate which he had been permitted to enter as Odin's messenger. From his cloudy height the Olympian chief discerned the move of the perfidious strategist, brandished one of his forked lightning-bolts, and Asgard beheld with amazement one of its mightiest hurled into oblivion.

Odin surveyed the situation, and recognized the hopelessness of the struggle, even if Ymir could be caused to budge and the giants of Jotunheim arrived in time. Where Thor failed who could succeed? And the dreaded Titans were likely to appear on the scene at

any moment. Thialfi was, therefore, directed to recall Thor, and ask the Olympians to suspend hostilities, pending the consideration of a peaceful settlement. The brightening of the atmosphere around Asgard indicated Odin's change of mind. Jupiter agreed to a truce, and Phœbus relaxed the severity of his unbearable heat. Odin declared himself willing to withdraw his Court to the extreme south, provided the Olympians would not follow him thither. Jupiter swore the irrevocable oath attested by the river Styx, that there shall be no further encroachments hereafter, come what may. And Mercury was instructed to convey peaceful greetings to Odin. "Let our brother know that we properly appreciate his magnanimous offer to withdraw further south; that we reluctantly waged war against a kindred power dethroned by Him who is above all enthroned. No, not thus shall we part, mailed in threatening panoply, with grim war bristling and sullen. Festive joy, cordial intercourse and divine conviviality shall mark the season of our conciliation. Great Odin and his Court are to

be honored in this hall. Since man has ceased to pay us worshipful homage, our own felicity be our sole care." In response to this effusion of friendship Odin signified his pleasure by ordering his black elves, to whose skilful workmanship Thor was indebted for his wonderful hammer, to throw an arched span of gold over the hollow which separated the mountains of Terror and Erebus. But the long-nosed, dirty little artificers durst not face Phœbus, whose glare brought them death; wherefore the blazing chariot of the sun-god made room for Aurora Australis, when the bridge rose like a vision, competing with the rainbow in multicolored brilliancy. For once Vulcan confessed surprise at the exquisite mastery in metal work in which he had thought himself unrivalled, while Pluto was amazed at the lavishness of the precious material, which he knew to be limited in quantity. Once more did Heimdall sound his horn, this time to proclaim the opening of the grand feast in which all the gods, goddesses, heroes and dependencies of Asgard were required to participate.

On their side the Olympians were neither to be eclipsed in splendor nor outdone in all that goes to make a feast of gods. Robed in supernal glory, each god and goddess, surrounded by their retinues, wore the symbols of their respective powers and attributes, but stood overawed by the transcendent magnificence of their chief, whom no mortal eye could behold without being consumed. From his throne above the clouds, surrounded by his family, who shone like stars, Jupiter beheld Odin issue from Valhalla, mounted on his eight-legged steed, Sleipnir, who could leap over mountains. Him followed Frigga and Freya, his wife and daughter, the one as beautiful as Iris, the other, who stood for love, blushing like sweet Aurora, escorted by Thor and his inseparable attendant, Thialfi. Like a stream of radiant gold, flowed behind them a host of sunny elves, diminutive creatures, stirring the air with weird music. In their wake, leading another host of those unsightly elves clad in burnished brass, and blowing sonorous instruments of the same metal, came Frey in a chariot drawn by the

boar Gullinbursti, along with Heimdall bestriding his horse, Gulltopp. The train's rear was taken up by a great number of inferior gods, heroes and mountain giants, as well as their colossal frost companions.

Gratifying his mischievous nature, Cupid perched himself on the main entrance guarded by Seasons, and as this goddess opened it to admit Odin and his cortege, a shower of love's arrows descended on the unsuspicious powers of Asgard, who were received by Pluto and Neptune, and led into the assembly hall of Jupiter's palace. Here the Olympian dynasty were found standing, except Jupiter and Juno, who likewise rose, while Venus, wearing the Cestus which imparts ineffable grace to the wearer, welcomed the head of Asgard and escorted him to a lofty throne at the left hand of her father. A sweet fragrance was diffused among the star-like assembly by a heavenly smile from Jupiter, who was at once captivated by the eyes of Freya, the goddess of love. Odin found it impossible to make a secret of his enchantment by Venus, while Thor had no eye for anyone but Hebe. Heim-

dall found in Juno the crown of sweetness, Thialfi bowed to Diana, and Frey paid his tender respects to Minerva. The other deities selected their partners in accordance with their natural bent of mind, or destined appointment in the divine economy.

Without, the subordinate attendants grouped themselves harmoniously, so that no sooner were the strains of Apollo's lyre heard, accompanied by the enravishing song of the Muses, than the broad spaces between the dwellings of the gods teemed with the airy dancers. Elf, nymph, naiad, satyr and dryad abandoned themselves to the spell of Apollo's music. This was only a faint reflex of what was doing in the star-illumined hall of the Olympian thunderer. Here the celestial food and beverage were being offered by Hebe, after the first grand march of the superior gods. Odin, who never tasted of Shrimnir's flesh, and indulged in but drink of the mead of the she-goat Heidrun, now emptied a capacious goblet of nectar handed him by Hebe, at the same time that one was given to Thor. The head of Asgard's Court found it hard to

swallow the strange liquid, so unlike mead, and, unable to retain it, ejected it in a manner to bring up the Olympian host and his entire house. As to Thor, the unspeakable drink and the mirth provoked by his ludicrous grimaces enraged him to such an extent that, but for the subduing charm of Hebe's look, he would have dashed his mallet against the very throne which filled gods with awe. Good nature prevailed, however, and as the refreshments passed around, the hilarity grew at the cost of Asgard.

Now struck Terpsichore her instrument, the graces joining to swell the strains which cause the gods to move in rhythmic measure. Looked at from the vantage ground occupied by Damon, the divine spectacle resembled a scattered constellation, the stars moving in pairs, then grouping in clusters, then spreading in lines, straight and curved, then forming in circles, then breaking up to renew and multiply the harmonious evolutions. There appeared nothing to intercept the minutest detail of the celestial scene, and Damon was intoxicated with felicity, ear and eye being

equally ravished. While the feast was at its height, Erebus shook with a convulsion which reminded Jupiter of the summons he had sent to Tartarus, and that the Titans had access to the upper world by way of the lava-vomiting mountain. At the same instant Heimdall gave the alarm, his ear having recognized the tramp of the Jotuns for whom Odin had sent his son, Hermond the Nimble. Quick as were the gods in rushing to arms, and in manning every strategic and vulnerable point, they were not quick enough to prevent a collision between Briareus on one side and Skrymir on the other, each one sustained by his gigantic followers, who tore up glaciers and made icebergs fly as flakes of snow driven by a storm. As if by a tacit understanding, Thor and Jupiter combined their terrific instruments of destruction, hurling them from opposite directions at the monstrous combatants, who heaped Pelion on Ossa in their furious efforts to crush each other. Briareus disappeared like a flash in the womb of Erebus, drawing his companions after him; the Jotuns took to their heels as fast as their gigantic limbs could carry them.

But there was no clearing of the atmosphere. The mountains trembled; the air grew oppressive and seemed saturated with fetid gases. A moment's ominous quiet was broken by another far-reaching convulsion, followed by a crack which terrified the gods and threw Damon out of his seat deep down into a chasm. The womb of Erebus opened wide. A deluge of fire burst from the bowels of the earth, melting glaciers and causing frozen seas to boil. Heaven glowed like a furnace, and Damon beheld with terror a stream of liquid metal pour down in a cataract from a height above his head. His attempt to flee from destruction proved his limbs to be of lead; he could not budge. He was going to be buried under fathoms of molten ore. Once more he tried to get to his feet, the glowing metal bursting on him from every side. In growing terror he grasped for something to assist him in his struggle for life, striking out right and left. His numbness gave way; his limbs softened in their joints, and a vitalizing energy enabled him to raise his head. What did he see? A full-rounded moon shedding a silver

flood on a slumbering landscape, glorified by a weird maze of far-away dazzling white, varied by domes and spires of other hues. It was neither Asgard nor the heavenly city built by Hephæstus; it was Damascus, oblivious of her impending doom. Damon was grateful to be here, conscious of the fact that the wizard he had followed had but sported with him. Yet what he had seen was worth the sacrifice. How much greater the God of infinity, how much holier than they of Asgard and Olympus, He with whom a myriad galaxies count for naught as He sways the boundless Universe by the breath of His mouth!

KING SOLOMON AND ASHMODAI.

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IT is well known that after Solomon had succeeded his father David as ruler over Israel he had a vision wherein the Lord gave him the choice between riches and wisdom, and that the youthful monarch gave wisdom the preference. In recognition of this he was not alone endowed with an understanding heart, but was given the means of acquiring great wealth, such as enabled him to build the most gorgeous of temples and the most sumptuous of palaces. The secret of Solomon's power was his possession of the Omnipotent Name engraved on his signet-ring, the use of which he was to learn by an accident.

The first great problem Solomon was called

upon to solve was how to build God's Temple in compliance with the unaccountable injunction not to employ iron implements in cutting, fitting or smoothing the materials of the sacred edifice. This prohibition implied the existence of a rock-splitting instrument of which neither the King nor his wisest counselors had any knowledge. Eldad the lonely dweller of the sacred caves, the reader of the stars, the wanderer of the desert, the recorder of traditions, Eldad, who at the age of one hundred and nineteen years had no wrinkle on his face, preserving his faculties in all their strength by means of the occult sciences, this wizard who was the engraver of the Ineffable Name on the King's ring, was summoned to appear before His Majesty to answer this question:

"Thou knowest, O, Eldad, that I am to build the House of God with materials unprepared by the use of any iron implement; no doubt Providence has provided the means for the raising of His Sanctuary; my advisers have failed to give me light on the mystery; should it be beyond thy power to enlighten me

on this matter, I shall not know whither to turn for the solution of the difficulty," spoke the King. To whom Eldad replied: "Know, O King, that in the beginning of things, as creation was nearing its completion, before the sun of the sixth day had withdrawn his last mellow beam from the earth, fourteen additional wonders were called into being, things which the foreknowledge of the All-knowing destined to play a part in this nether world. They are, the mouth of the earth that swallowed Korah and his rebellious followers; the mouth of the fountain known as Miriam's Well, the unfailing spring whose flow accompanied Israel through the desert, joining in the hymn of praise; the mouth of the brute that spoke to Balaam, after the heathen prophet had beaten it three times, he not having seen the angel that deterred it from advancing; the multicolored rainbow which symbolizes God's mercy to frail man; the manna, Israel's food for forty years; the staff wherewith Moses performed all his miracles; the two sapphires out of which the tablets of the Law were cut; the gems that spelt the Ten

Commandments; the letters of the alphabet; the sepulchre of Moses never seen by a mortal eye; the ram destined to be the substitute of Isaac when on the point of being sacrificed; the first pair of tongs, without which no iron could ever be forged; the spirits, both good and evil, the Sabbath having begun before bodies could be formed for some souls, thus left forever disembodied; and the *Shamir*, a worm not larger than a grain of barley, but stronger than rock, which it splits by the mere touch. The *Shamir*, O, King, is the only might in creation to do the work in accordance with the divine behest. Those priceless gems of which the tablets and the letters thereon are cut have been fashioned by the *Shamir*."

"That *Shamir* shall be in my power, O, Eldad, it being there for the building of God's house, as it was there to materialize His immutable Word. But tell me who on earth claims possession of that wonderful creature? Is it to be had by trade, purchase, strategy, or force?" cried the King, deeply agitated.

"King, beyond what I have told thee my knowledge goes not. The abyss says: It is

not in me, and the ocean says: I own it not. Hitherto the *Shamir* has been beyond the reach of human eye. Whether it can be had, the future will tell. Here my wisdom ends," concluded the hoary wizard, withdrawing from the royal presence. It was late in the evening when the King retired to a restless bed. Light and fitful as were his slumbers, his mind was haunted by weird visions of desolate scenes, cliffs infested with fierce carrion birds, and chasms teeming with venomous reptiles. The first blush of the morning found the monarch on one of his gilded balconies from which he surveyed the floral glories of his exuberant gardens, inhaling the odoriferous breezes of the peaceful morrow. Nature stood in her loveliness, and animate creation seemed to breathe peace. Suddenly there was a scream of pain in one of the towering clusters of green, and the next instant two specimens of the feathered tribes dropped at the feet of the King. In the talons of a carnivorous fowl was closed the tender wing of a trembling dove as white as snow. Moved by the impulse of pity, the King had his strong

grip on the neck of the obscene bird of prey, relieving the other, but not before the victim's wing was broken. Great as was the anger of the King to see the poor dove bleeding and helpless, his astonishment was greater at the instantaneous transformation of the ferocious fowl in his grasp; fowl no more but demon, black and mighty, swelling to enormous proportions, and beseeching the royal captor to set him free.—"Whatever thou biddest me I will do, O, master, the ring on thy finger giving thee power over Ashmodai and his legions, to which I belong doing service as commanded," stated the dark agent submissively.

"And what cause underlies thy vicious onslaught against so pure a creature as this dove?" asked Solomon, the revelation breaking on him that his signet-ring invested him with a power akin to omnipotence.

"A symbol of purity, the dove comes under the ban of us who are of Ashmodai's dark legion,* explained the fiend with unreserved candor.

* Talmudic angelology assigns to Ashmodai the inferior rank of presiding over the evil demons under the

"Thou shalt not go hence before I learn of thee who treasures the *Shamir*," said Solomon firmly, assuming the demon to know something about it.

"What art thou seeking of me, O, master, who am one of inferior rank bending to the

rule of Samaël (אשמדאי מלכא רבא דשידאי); while Matatron is the recognized chief of the infinite hosts teeming throughout the universe, holding at the same time the office of benign intercession between man and Supreme Grace, and Synadalphon is the next in power, standing on earth with his head reaching to the highest cherubim (מלאך אחד עומד בארץ וראשו מגיע אצל החיות סנדלפון שמו). Like Samaël and Lilith, Ashmodai impersonates evil in a variety of manifestations. Neither Dumah, the prince of the winds and the custodian of the dead, nor Rohab, the lord of the ocean, are to be degraded to the rank of Ashmodai who dwells in the clouds but depends for his sustenance on what the earth produces. It is to be remarked, however, that the Rabbis take the dark and the bright powers to represent physical forces co-existent with creation (כשנקש קב"ה לבריאות העולם ברא כח של מלאכי השרת.) This idea is sustained by the additional assertion that the creative energy is incessant, Omnipotence calling forth daily new ministers to carry out His inscrutable designs. (נבראין מלאכי השרת בגהר דינור, מכל דיבור שיצא מפי קב"ה נברא מלאך.)

will of our chief Ashmodai, the mighty spirit of this world? Him thou art to question, because he is the one to satisfy thy demand," replied the demon. "Describe his retreat to me and its approaches, and thou shalt go free," commanded the son of David.

"He is to be found where no creature of flesh and blood can long endure; it is not heaven; neither is it earth; in the heart of the Orient, on the highest peak of the highest mountain range, a hollow summit crowned with eternal snow, holding under seal before a recess of frozen crystal the purest spring under the heaven to give him drink, that is Ashmodai's retreat. Hither he descends from his cloud-vested realm, scans the seal to assure himself that no impurity has polluted his delicious beverage, when, having quenched his thirst, he re-seals the fountain, gives audience to his court, who flock hither to receive their orders, and, refreshed by slumber, reascends to control the elements and survey the work of his active host," was the information, which insured the demon's release,

In earnest consultation with his general

Benaiah, Solomon matured the plan for the attack of Ashmodai's retreat, and ere long a well-equipped expedition of a few picked men headed by that undaunted warrior, departed secretly. The haunt of the demoniac chief was not only far to the south-east of the Holy Land, but it was so located that in order to approach it the adventurers had to cross deserts, traverse pestiferous swamps infested with scorpions and dragons, ford wild rivers, and bridge over chasms, only to see themselves in a labyrinth of stupendous rocks, supermounted by a chain of sky-towering peaks lost in dense fogs. Benaiah's eagle eye swept the clouded outlines of the snow-capped heights, trying in vain to locate the spot to be invaded. The impenetrable curtain of shifting fogs precluded accurate observation, and for once the dashing general felt that he was more in need of daring and of patience than of strategy. Retiring with his men to a cave at the base of the mountain, Benaiah took a position which commanded the loftiest point of the summit, hoping that something would occur to betray the object of his quest. Benaiah was struck

by the contrast of the frowning mountain-crest on one hand, and the sun's pure effulgence on the other. As he had his eyes riveted on the broken summit, the dense mass of fog darkened perceptibly. A noise as of a boisterous sea repelled by a rocky shore was the precursor of a tempest and an earthquake which convulsed the entire region within and without, thunder and lightning adding to the uproar. The eternal snows on the crest rose pulverized by the fury of a chaotic storm,—a hurricane intermixed with flashes of red fire,—the whole reducing itself within a few seconds to a funnel-shaped whirlwind, revolving with furious speed, its pivot centred in a hollow betwixt mighty cliffs, rendered visible by the convulsive phenomenon. Benaiah knew what it meant, and he was confirmed in his assumption that Ashmodai was descending by observing the same disturbance a few hours later when the demon re-ascended to his airy empire.

Like a good strategist, the general took a little time to study the situation. The ascent of the mountain had to be made with great

"Like a thunderbolt striking to the centre of a hurricane, the demon shot down." Page 173.

care, and the proceedings of the chief demon observed from as near a station as was compatible with safety. The climbing was attended with much toil and great danger, but the point was reached, the ground surveyed, and a hiding place secured in a recess barred by a wall of solid ice. Here everything was held in readiness for the next step.

If Ashmodai's descent startled the adventurers from a distance, nearness to the spot of his landing filled them with dismay, the atmospheric and subterranean agitation threatening to sweep them out of their hiding place. Like a thunderbolt striking to the centre of a hurricane, the demon shot down, unsealed his well, plunged his lips in the beryl fluid, drawing up a great quantity, and then sealed it up again. He was hardly ready when the tableland around him was thick with files of demons, who arrived to report what had been accomplished, and to take orders for new tasks. They were all chiefs, of various ranks, each one having legions to carry out his behests. From the reports and the schemes discussed it was clear that they represented three kinds

of spirits as to their relation to mankind—of hostility, friendliness, and neutrality. There was a division of labor,—hostile, benevolent, and neutral.

It is impossible to say how the daring band of interlopers would have fared at the hands of the terrible chief and his demonic army had not Benaiah possessed the Omnipotent Name to shield him from discovery. As matters stood the demons, unconscious of any unwelcome presence, departed, leaving Ashmodai to take his accustomed slumber, after which he darted up like a flash, with the phenomenal accompaniment of elemental disturbance as before. Now came Benaiah's opportunity. Without touching the seal on the cover of the well, the contents were drawn out through a hole skilfully bored beneath the surface of the liquid. This done, the hole was carefully closed, and another one was bored on the opposite side at a higher level, through which wine was poured to fill the emptied well. With every trace removed to avoid suspicion, and every detail ready for the emergency, Benaiah waited patiently for the next day

when everything passed off as before, except the astonishment of the dreaded power when he found that his well contained wine instead of water. Doomed by destiny to fall into the trap set for him, and urged by a parching thirst, Ashmodai took but little time to consider the advisability of drinking the intoxicating beverage, balancing Scriptural texts *pro* and *con*, and soon deciding to try its effect on his semi-ethereal nature. This was just what Solomon and his general had counted on. Ashmodai had scarcely dismissed his military Council when the wine began to do its work; he felt as he had never felt before, and he discussed with himself the singular mood into which he found himself plunged, in what way he could not account for, the sensation being wholly new in his superhuman experience. Sleep was on him, and there he lay, stretched out as helpless as a senseless block. Benaiah was at hand with a chain rendered resistless by the Omnipotent Name engraved upon its links. Slipping it around the waist and the neck of the prince of demons, his potency was disposed of. Ashmodai's consternation

when awakened words cannot describe. A roar of rage darkened all nature, shook the mountains to their foundation, and horrified all his legions who fled to hide themselves in the deepest chasms, even in the bowels of the earth and under the waters of the sea. For a moment Benaiah lost his speech, while his companions fell prostrate on the ground. The demon assumed every shape of horror to overawe the enemies of his freedom. In a few moments he gave himself the deterring shapes of all that is monstrous and deadly in nature, from the enraged tiger to the hissing serpent whose bite is death; all in vain.—"In the Name of the Most High, I, Benaiah, chief of King Solomon's army, do herewith command thee, Ashmodai, mighty Prince of genii, to follow me to the seat of the wisest King, who needs thy aid to build the Temple of God."

The conjuration conquered all resistance, and the demon was led off disarmed and humiliated. Realizing the hopelessness of gaining anything by violence, Ashmodai feigned submissiveness, assumed the form and manner of a most polished and affable courtier,

and, ushered into the presence of the King, charmed His Majesty by discourse of things far above the comprehension of ordinary men.

"Thou art to deliver to me the *Shamir* so that God's House be built without the use of iron implements," said Solomon to Ashmodai.

"The Shamir is not in my keeping, great King; the spirit of the ocean has entrusted it to the fowl Awza that it be preserved forever in a state of perfection," replied Ashmodai, adding, "and no man can come near that bird."

"Tell me where Awza breeds her young," commanded the King.

"South of the great desert there is a mountain with a towering cliff and walls so steep and smooth that a spider has difficulty to climb it. On the top of that rock is the nest of Awza, a fowl with claws of steel and eyes of fire, swift as the swallow, larger than the vulture, and fiercer than the eagle," answered the demon.

Again Benaiah was placed at the head of an expedition, and many were the hardships before the solitary pile rose before the eyes

of the indomitable general. There was neither a bird to be seen nor a nest. The head of the precipitous rock was so high above the clouds that there seemed no possibility of scaling it. But Benaiah was full of resources and had anticipated the difficulty by bringing with him a pair of pigeons. Having left a man with the female bird this side of the mountain, the general made a detour for the opposite side with the male, tied a cord to his foot, and allowed him to rise. Guided by his instinct, the pigeon soon soared above the rock, descending to join his mate. This accomplished, a heavier cord was trailed over, followed by a still heavier rope strong enough to lift a man. This man was Benaiah who, in the dark of night, was hauled up by his attendants. Awza was thus to be circumvented.

Great was the general's joy when he found himself before the nest occupied by its fledglings, Awza being happily away in search for food. A transparent stone is laid securely over the nest. Awza arrives, finds her fledglings imprisoned, hungry, and crying. With motherly tenderness she hurries to split the

stone by applying the *Shamir*. Benaiah's great chance is come. From behind a bowlder he bursts forth and frightens the bird; she drops the invaluable worm. Benaiah pounces upon it like an eagle. The male bird is soon on the spot. A desperate struggle ensues between the enraged birds and the daring Benaiah. He is armed against iron claws, and is not deterred by fiery eyes. He has the trophy and he holds it, placing it in due time at the feet of his master, to the great surprise of Ashmodai. Thus is the building of God's Temple proceeded with, the *Shamir* splitting and fitting the materials.

Solomon's thirst for wisdom grew with his growing consciousness of the painful limitations as regards its acquisition by man, and Ashmodai availed himself of the King's avidity for knowledge in the hope of throwing him off his guard. He taught him the secrets of the vegetable and mineral kingdoms, and gave him the clue to intercourse with animal creation, including the mind-reading faculty. As a final achievement he suggested the weaving of a prodigious air-float large enough to transport

the King on his throne, an army fully equipped, and a host of spirits. On this air-ship, sixty miles square, Solomon, ever accompanied by Ashmodai, traversed great distances, soaring above the clouds, higher than the eagle, and looking down on earth like a god. Woven by genii of the most subtile essences of nature, the texture of that air-island was of azurean translucency, green-blue in color, floating in the sun's radiance like a rippled sea bathed in gold.

But the marvel of the marvelous equipage was its circular pavilion vast in extent and fashioned of rainbow-tints, which photographed, enormously magnified, whatever came within the range of the eye that controlled its course, laying bare the mysteries of land and ocean, and revealing the multifarious activities of the spirit-world under the rule of Ashmodai. Here Solomon's wonder-throne, ascended by seven steps, each one guarded by a pair of magnificent animals chosen from the respective species of the lion, the elephant, the tiger, the bear, the serpent, the antelope, and the eagle, stood on a dais, lofty and brilliant, eclipsed only by the monarch's crown

which rivaled the sun in splendor. Solomon began to believe that he was really more than human, and Ashmodai lost no chance to swell the autocrat's overbearing vanity. Solomon was so delighted with his triumph over the chief of demons and the deep secrets he had wrested from him, that he indefinitely deferred setting him free long after the Temple had been dedicated with grand ceremony, and, thanks to rock-bursting *Shamir*, cargoes of gold were pouring into the royal treasury.

One early morning the sovereign of the richest kingdom upon earth bade the winds raise and waft his imponderable encampment toward the rising day, he being enthroned in his pavilion with Ashmodai at his feet. Up soared the magic float, lighter than air, transparent as ether, and stronger than adamant, hurrying eastward as an undulating firmament, suffused with purple and gold. The soundless vast above, coupled with the radiant flood that broke from the East, and the amazing kaleidoscope of animal and spirit life startlingly reflected by the walls of the glowing pavilion, overawed the mind of the most

daring of kings, who exclaimed: "How great the all-powerful God, in whose infinity we are not more than an atom in the universe of matter!"

"Great King, thy head is the microcosm of the immensity whose contemplation overpowers thee. The heavens hide nothing which man cannot own if he but knew how," said Ashmodai with a pull at his chain.

"Thou art speaking riddles, potent spirit. Give me certainty that my grave is not the end, and thy chains shall be broken," cried Solomon.

"King, disembodied thou art my like, spirit of the everlasting Source, unchanged by change, but for the time dimmed, because engrossed with what is unethereal here. Yet even in thy mortal coil I can give thee, if restored to liberty, by virtue of thy signet-ring, a glimpse of things above thy highest dreams, provided thou wilt give me leave to stimulate thy spiritual essence for the transmutation by harmony such as, at thy bidding, I can cause my spirits to produce," promised Ashmodai.

"Then let the air vibrate with melody such

as will fit my grosser substance for thy suggested change," commanded Solomon, thoughtlessly.

At this the atmosphere trembles with the voices of a myriad chorus, throwing the King into an ecstasy of delight, ravishing his soul and causing his tears to flow. In his ecstatic transport the monarch bids Ashmodai to come within the reach of his hand; a touch breaks the chains of the wily demon, another movement of the hand delivers to him the signet-ring—and then—the symphony sounds like the hissing of twenty thousand serpents, night swallows the rays of the sun, a burst as of a hundred batteries shakes the firmament, a tremendous pillar of lurid flame shoots up into the height of azure, from its core darts forth a bundle and vanishes beyond the sea; —it is Solomon whom, by the might of his regained breath, Ashmodai has hurled to the end of earth,* allowing him to fall unhurt; the

* The old version of the Talmud has it thus: "Solomon sent Benaiah to bring him the Shamir from Ashmodai, and he threw him out of his kingdom." שלמה שלך לבניהו להביא לו השמיר מאשמדאי והשליכו ממלכותו

ring the demon drops into the deep. All this is the work of a moment, after which the atmosphere is clear and bright, the hissing ceases, and Solomon is on his throne,—that is it is Ashmodai in the guise of Solomon robed in royalty to mock the power of the cast-away autocrat.

Who could be wise enough to unmask the fraudulent usurper? Who would blame a spirit for avenging an outrageous humiliation? The court was informed that the chief of demons had escaped, and everything went on as before, including the tender attention due to the inmates of the royal harem.

Poor Solomon picked himself up in a far distant land, astonished and confused. His memory failed him; he stood transformed in face and form, and only darkly remembered that he had been a king somewhere. From his situation he could well infer that he had had some foolish dream of pomp and lordship. In reality he was a homeless beggar, shattered in health and unsound in mind. Starvation forced him to beg for bread, and vagabonds were his bed-fellows in the wretched retreats

open to the outcasts of humanity. His hours were divided between waking and dreaming; sane moments were followed by invasions of melancholy. Sometimes he doubted that his name was Solomon, that the world around him was real. A hard time was in store for the befooled wise man. Slowly the faculty of memory returned, and the singular circumstances which placed him where he found himself rose clearly before his recollection.

However, the knowledge of things immaterial which Solomon had acquired by his intimate intercourse with Ashmodai afforded him some help and comfort during his long wanderings from place to place,—unhonored, often the target of ridicule to such as heard him descant on his Solomonic pretensions. Great was his pain on hearing one day a strange traveller speak of the real Solomon's wisdom, his glorious rule, and the uncounted wealth that reached him by land and sea. "Can it be that I am mad? If Solomon reigns in Jerusalem, who am I?" asked of himself the confounded beggar king, and prayed humbly

that he might be enlightened as to the nature of his condition. His pride was broken.

One late afternoon the royal wayfarer arrived, tired and hungry, before the gate of an inhospitable city. At first the unfriendly inhabitants denied him admission, but on hearing him claim the title of Solomon the Wise, they allowed his majesty to enter, convinced that they had a madman before them. Beyond this their hospitality did not extend. With a crust of bread as his supper, the unpitied monarch found no softer couch than the turf of a roofless enclosure, with many animals as his companions. The night was cold, and the situation tormenting for a starved man who had nothing wherewith to cover himself. After a few hours of restless slumber, Solomon felt his limbs so badly cramped that he was obliged to rise and walk to keep his blood in circulation. In the dimness of a clouded moon Solomon came near an old mare full of bruises, and so emaciated that one had no difficulty in counting her ribs. Solomon's experience rendered him accessible to sympathy with life in misery, and he derived sad consolation from

the sight of other creatures who were even more wretched than he. He reflected that man is the source of great torments and wretchedness here below in inflicting pain on creatures entrusted him by a kind Providence.

It was about midnight when the royal beggar rose again to renew his walk, finding it impossible to drown his worry in oblivious sleep. The moon shone brightly, and the deep silence held the weird landscape in magic repose, forming a strong contrast with the agitation suppressed in the king's bosom. Presently familiar notes fell on Solomon's ear; it was the speech of the ill-fated mare, who spoke words of sorrow to her inexperienced family, giving them her maternal advice, now that her end was near. With bated breath the man listened to the story of a life-long agony, recited by a creature of the noblest species under human control.

"Yes, I have often been whipped and kicked by my cruel master. Ah, hunger, too, and thirst,—the heat by day and the cold by night, I endured; toiling, toiling under the rod, and now that I am old he has turned me out that I

perish unsheltered, unfed. Too weak am I to drive off the flies which torture me, and death will not come. Once I was led to believe that we horses had an advantage over the animals that are slaughtered for food. The sight of a victim's blood shed by the carnivorous lust of man made me shudder. I have seen the head of the fowl twisted off, have seen lambs swim in their blood, have seen the calf taken for slaughter from the side of her dam who rent the air with lamentation, have seen cattle felled by the deadly club in the hand of gluttonous man. And have I not, in my younger days, been used in the chase? Mounted on me, my master, in company of his like, thought it great sport to unleash a pack of bloody hounds in pursuit of a frightened hare, fox, or deer. Hunted down, the agonized creatures fell, to be torn to pieces. Man is our devil, helpless, dumb animals that we are. Enough is there in nature to glut his hunger. The hen supplies him with her eggs, the cow with her milk and with butter and cheese, and the lamb with its wool; while we carry him and his burdens, multiply his strength in

battle, and gratify his love of pomp and pleasure. Honey, fruits, mushrooms, and a variety of grains and vegetables should protect animate creation from his deathful greed."

"There will be a dead fellow to-morrow," said a lusty colt made hot by his dam's tale of woe. "That master of thine will not long be master of mine; one kick of my hind legs will do for him; let him try it with me; he won't whip me a second time."

"Child, never try it, if thou lovest me," cried the intelligent, but much-abused mare. "A vicious horse, as they brand one who resents abuse, is sure to get his double share of torture; I have tried it and had the worst of it. Kick once your master and his vengeance will take years to bleed you to death."

"But I won't stand it. I will kick right and left, break windows, bones, vehicles, break whatever comes in my way, and break myself if it must be. They will be kept busy watching my legs; I won't stand it," answered the colt determinedly.

"Thou mayest as well kick against a rock and have thy hind legs broken, or throw thy-

self into a millpond and be drowned, as seek revenge by hurting thy master. We are not unavenged, however. Nature, our common mother, does not allow her offenders to go unpunished. If man would simply be content to live on what the animal and vegetable kingdoms freely give him, he would be a much happier, tamer, healthier and nobler being. Chase and slaughter create that ferocious temper which revels in bloodshed, so that his own kindred bleed, victims of his atrocity. Child, I, too, have revolted in my time. Exasperated by the cuts of a whip in the hand of a miscreant, I once made a wild break for deliverance, fled madly through the street, dashed against everything in my way, — dashed against a throng of men, women and children, who tried vainly to escape,—did all the harm I could, and landed bruised and breathless among the terrified children in an open schoolyard, killing one and hurting others. Thereafter I was treated as the savage beast, was kicked in and out of time, my legs being fettered and my head held fast by a chain tied to the wall. When employed, the bit in my

mouth was cruelly tight; and that was all I gained. A higher will must have decreed this to be our lot," concluded the starving mare, lowering her head mournfully.

Solomon, whom the equine group had not noticed, approached and astonished them by addressing them in the language they so well understood. The luckless mare raised her head, and her glazed eyes flashed as the soft voice of the king uttered this:

"Thou art right, Oh, noble creature, in charging thy master with unkindness and ingratitude toward thy high-spirited race that has rendered him invaluable service. Yea, man is as yet a child and a slave of habit, but will in due time rise to an understanding of his duties toward the myriad lives around him, not created for wanton abuse or ruthless destruction. Indeed, he pays dearly for the gratification of his lower instincts, the benign Creator having meant him to be prompted by the gentler, deeper, sweeter qualities of his being. The day will come when he will shudder at the idea of sustaining his life by the immolation of others, when the flesh-eater will

be seen in the same light as the cannibal.—My name is Solomon, and in my kingdom they called me The Wise, but my wisdom fails to enlighten me why things are as they are when they could be so much better. Believe me, man has tortures of body and soul, and has, like you, his devil to plague and circumvent him. Holy Writ contains beautiful words in praise of the horse, he, armed with thunder, nobler than the lion, fearless as the eagle, graceful as the zebra, strong as the wave, quick as the wind, the pride of the warrior, the pleasure of the prince, the seat of the king. Once restored to power, I will remember the burden of thy grievance, faithful mare, and thy race will be benefited as far as my will shall prevail."

The horses were pleased with the sympathetic words of their distinguished friend, and the ambitious colt offered to carry him as far as he wished. Solomon had plenty of leisure to explain the difficulty into which he had been plunged by the wiles of Ashmodai, and that he was sure of restoration the moment he could enter the gates of his beloved Jerusalem.

"May thy wisdom, thy kindness, and thy kingdom spread far and wide, Oh, King! so that my helpless offsprings be spared the torments that I have endured during the length of my days!" prayed the mare, with a tremor which betrayed extreme weakness. The next instant saw the poor brute tremble, stagger, fall and expire.

If Solomon had counted on an easy triumph over his formidable adversary, his arrival at Jerusalem, after years of untold hardships and trials, undeceived him. The city showed every indication of great prosperity; the kingdom stood firmly established, and the brilliance of the royal Court had no rival in the gorgeous Orient. Embassies came to pay the homage of princedoms and empires near and far, bringing presents of rare animals, gold, costly products, and precious stones, and they departed overawed by the superhuman wisdom of Israel's mighty ruler, who amazed the ambassadors not alone by addressing each one in his native language, but by showing a minute acquaintance with their secret matters of state, and by reading their hidden thoughts.

The envoys reported to their sovereigns that a demi-god had come to reign over an earthly kingdom.

For a shabby mendicant to overthrow a power of Ashmodai's devices and resources was indeed a business to make even a Solomon despair of success.

Having entered the city, the beggar-king sought the haunts of the paupers without breathing a syllable as to his identity, lest Ashmodai be alarmed by his presence, which was a circumstance to be feared. Solomon the beggar knew that he looked so unlike Solomon the Wise that he long hesitated to approach his whilom faithful Benaiah, who, innocent of the demon's fraud, continued as dashing and as loyal as ever before. The attempt at an interview resulted in the general's throwing a silver coin to get rid of the importunate beggar, who dared accost him as though he was his equal. In his despondency Solomon turned his back on his endeared capital, roamed about for many days distracted with grief, until, having caught sight of the sea, he fell prostrate on the shore, prayed in great hu-

mility, wept and fell asleep. He had a dream in which Eldad, who had died during his wanderings, appeared to him in the guise of an angler, unloosening a large fish from his hook which he presented to the dreamer. A scream in the air startled Solomon from his sleep, and a slap on his cheek by some cold thing brought him to his feet. Before him lay a fish in contortions, above him two birds were soaring, one higher than the other, who, in their fight for the prey, evidently had allowed it to drop on the sleeper's face. Parched with thirst and stung by hunger, Solomon tore the fish open, when, lo! the ring, Eldad's gift, the all-controlling charm, was there. No sooner was it on the King's finger than an appalling earthquake shook the shore, while from the heart of God's city burst a prodigious pillar of smoke and flame, losing itself in the deep azure. Useless to add that this was the trail of Ashmodai's precipitous flight, who, immediately apprised of his adversary's triumph, fled as fast as he could, spreading consternation as he went.

Solomon by this time had enough experience with the chief of demons to last him for

the rest of his life; yet nothing else but Ashmodai's subsequent vengeance was the cause of his falling from grace in after years, so that the wisest of ancient kings not alone forfeited the power vested in the Omnipotent Name, but closed a glorious career so ingloriously that he died an object of pity to some of his subjects and of hatred to the rest. Having secured the means of building the Temple without the aid of ordinary implements, he would have acted wisely in dismissing the chief of invisible hosts instead of detaining him unjustly, and preying into mysteries not intended for man. Solomon's aspiration to be more than human, while it gratified his vanity, brought on eventually his ruin, while his mind was never at ease, even under the constant guardianship of the "Heroic Sixty," his close body-guard.

NOTE.—"We also tried Solomon, and placed on his throne a counterfeit body; afterward he turned unto God and said, O Lord, forgive me, and give me a kingdom which may not be obtained by any after me; for thou art the bestower of kingdoms. And we made the wind subject to him; it ran gently at his command whithersoever he directed, and we also put the demons

in subjection under him, and among them such as were every way skilled in building, and in diving for pearls." (Koran, Surah 38.)

The Talmudic version of Solomon's temporary dethronement runs thus:—Conscious of the fact that the stability of his kingdom depended on the signet on his finger, Solomon had but one trusty concubine named Amina whom he entrusted with the invaluable jewel during moments when the body's natural functions rendered its removal obligatory, it bearing the ineffable Name. One day Sakhar, a malicious demon, appeared to Amina in the shape of Solomon, possessed himself of the ring, usurped the throne, transformed or deformed the real monarch, and ruled the land to suit himself, altering the laws, and doing all the mischief a devil is capable of doing. In the meantime Solomon, distracted by the incident, and wholly unknown to his court, wandered about, depending on alms for subsistence. This misadventure of the wise king was brought about by an image of himself made for worship at his order by another devil to comfort his favorite wife, Jerada, the beautiful princess of Sidon, whose father had fallen during the siege of that city by Solomon's army. As soon as the worship of the image ceased, the devil fled the palace and threw the signet into the sea. A fish swallowed the thaumaturgic ring, was caught, and providentially fell into Solomon's hand, thus possessing him of the omnipotent charm which enabled him to recover his kingdom. As to Sakhar, he was caught,

a stone was tied around his neck, and he was ruthlessly thrown into the lake of Tiberias. Sakhar standing for the Hebrew noun *sheker*—falsehood, and Amina for *emunah*,—falth or firmness, the deeper sense of the allegory needs no further elucidation. Among the most familiar legends which cluster around Solomon's rule is that of his green carpet woven of silk and of a magnitude sufficiently ample not alone to hold his throne, but an army of men to his right hand and a host of spirits to his left. At the king's command the winds transported the entire equipment, slow or fast, according to his majesty's pleasure, while the royal head was shaded by an enormous flock of birds on the wing. Countenance is given to this fable in the Koran, —"And his armies were gathered together unto Solomon, consisting of genii, and men, and birds." (Surah, 27.)

THE CROESUS OF YEMEN.

THE CROESUS OF YEMEN.

SANAA, the capital of Yemen, is one of the noblest cities of Arabia Felix, and is said to rival beautiful Damascus in many of her exquisite features. The Imam of Yemen who ruled in the beginning of this century could claim rank among the most whimsical princes who ever sat on a throne. He was a man of weak intellect, strong passion, boundless vanity, and a religious enthusiasm entirely foreign to his subjects, who are indifferent followers of Mohammed. That eccentric Commander of the Faithful conceived the singular fancy that he was animated by the soul of the last Prophet, and he suited his conduct to his conceit, there being no one to dispute his ludicrous presumption. He dressed in green, sermonized his people in the style of

the Koran, read *surahs* of his own creation, raved of his nocturnal visits to heaven, descanted on visions and revelations vouchsafed to him, and scrupulously arranged his household in imitation of Mohammed's, not forgetting the seventeen wives of the founder of Islam, including an Ayesha, who was the power behind the Imam's throne, being the flower of his harem.

The most important person who stood next to the Imam in power, and above him in wisdom, was the great Kadi, or judge, Omar, who presided over the supreme court of Sanaa, and was in fact the walking code and cyclopædia of Yemen. What he did not know only Allah and His Prophet could reveal. The wise Kadi had no doubt at all that the Imam was a spiritual duplicate of the true Prophet, and he received in recognition the proud title of the "Lion of God," reminiscent of Mohammed's most devoted champion who fought his battles, and died sword in hand.

Omar plied his legal profession so well, had so many questions of justice and equity referred to him from every quarter of the land,

that he rose to be the wealthiest Moslem of Sanaa, exceeded in his opulence by one man only, and that was the renowned Ben Abir, surnamed "The Crœsus of Yemen." Ben Abir was no Moslem, but a Hebrew, and one who feared nothing so much as the remote likelihood of slighting his faith.

The Imam's ruling passion for prophetic honors was equalled by his unprophetic mania for building monumental structures with an extravagance which drained his treasure. Lacking the vast resources of the Caliph of Estamboul, the prince of Yemen nevertheless aspired to rival the head of the faithful in the monumental magnificence of his great capital; and immense sums were lavished on the embellishments of a city which was meant to dazzle even the strangers who had wondered at the imperial palaces of the mighty Sultan himself. The drawback was the limited revenues of the Imam's domains, and the shrewd Kadi, forestalling the danger of a royal recourse to his riches, was instrumental in causing his master to draw on Ben Abir for large sums, in return for titles and privileges

which enabled the misused Israelite to indemnify himself in a measure for advances he never expected to see returned. Unlimited in the extent of his commercial enterprises, and furnished with as many military escorts as he chose to ask for, Ben Abir's caravans carried loads of silk, cotton, hardware, weapons and trinkets as far as Hadramaut, Hejaz and Nejd, fearless of the dangers of the Tehamah and the deathful simoons of the arid desert; and they returned to the seashore with tons of coffee, packs of gum, ostrich feathers, dyes and pearls, which foreign vessels carried to distant lands. To all this Ben Abir added the breeding of the finest Arabian horses, such as are only found in Nejd, and it became a current saying that whatever the Crœsus of Yemen touched turned into gold.

Now, it happened that, previous to the closing celebration of the Ramadhan Fast, Ben Abir presented his sovereign with one of his choicest Nejdi stallions, of spotless white and a most fiery temper, caparisoned in the most approved fashion. Delighted with the gift, the Imam showed his appreciation by mount-

ing the spirited animal on the solemn occasion brought about by the sacrificial ceremony which marks the close of the Fast. As ill-luck would have it, a distracted saint, who had just issued from his cave looking more like a chimpanzee than a human being, threw himself in the way of the stallion with a yell that frightened both horse and rider. Snorting and balking in recoil from the object of terror, the high-spirited creature reared and fell backward injuring the Kadi, who was behind, and landing the second edition of the Prophet on a rock, with a broken leg and a dislocated jaw as mementos of the inauspicious incident. Somebody had to be burdened with the blame, and the Kadi realized his opportunity. As soon as sufficiently recovered from his own hurts to sit in judgment, Omar declared Ben Abir guilty of high treason for having tempted the Imam to mount a mad horse, and condemned him to perish by decapitation, unless he should ransom his life for a fabulous sum, which was named, with the additional condition that it be paid in solid gold. Within twenty-four hours the gold was in the hands

of the Imam's treasurer, and Ben Abir was a poor man.

When Ayesha, the flower of the royal harem, who was of Hebraic origin, heard of the Kadi's sentence, she appealed to her prophetic lord's conscience against the flagrant injustice. The Imam was moved to the extent of offering to return a small portion of the robbery, provided the Hebrew would enter the mosque. Ben Abir would not listen to the thought of such treason to the God of his fathers, and had a brave wife to sustain him in his trial, with two children, one an ineffably charming maiden, to comfort him. Nor was he entirely destitute, his commercial credit remaining good.

In one of the mountain ranges of Yemen one Friday afternoon, as the sun began to approach the rim of the horizon, a small caravan made a halt. The dromedaries were freed from their burdens and allowed to browse, and a dark tent was stretched for the use of the master of the caravan. On a matting on the ground a rug was spread and a few pillows were put thereon for the ease of a middle-aged person

who, dismounting from his horse, took possession of the transient resting-place. As soon as he found himself within the tent he washed himself with water drawn from the nearest spring, changed his garments, brought forth a silver lamp, which he filled with oil, a silver flask full of wine, and a goblet of the same metal. With nightfall the lamp illumined the tent, and the inmate stood lost in prayer, with his face turned to the east. A blessing uttered over the wine was followed by a frugal meal, and the rest of the evening was spent in study of sacred lore. At the entrance to the tent, near a spear struck into the soil, stood a black sentry, while at a distance the camel drivers made themselves comfortable for the night. The lord of the caravan was Ben Abir, his sentinel was Ibraeem, a freed slave, who, having been treated kindly by his master in his happier days, would not desert him now that fortune declined to smile on him.

The night was very dark, and would have been voiceless but for the sighs and moans of the dromedaries, who seemed audibly to commiserate one with another upon the hardships

of life. About midnight the silence was unbroken, the discontented animals having buried their sense of trouble in dreamless sleep. At this hour Ben Abir was roused by his faithful attendant, who informed him of a great marvel that was to be seen before the tent. A heap of gold cropped up from the ground, each coin scintillating like a star. "Rise, O, master! Allah sends thee a treasure," cried the devoted slave.

"What is it thou art raving of, O, Ibraeem!—art thou dreaming?" said Ben Abir.

"Indeed I am wide awake, O, master!—step forth and trust to thine own senses if thou doubtest mine; here is the hoard Allah would have thee take," insisted Ibraeem.

As Ben Abir peered out of his tent to convince himself of Ibraeem's illusion, he saw with amazement a golden pile of coin, the pieces glowing like lupine eyes in the dark. This is a temptation of the evil one, thought the scrupulous Israelite, who would not have touched pelf on this Sabbath for the wealth of the Indies.

"Touch not a piece of this hoard, Oh, Ibraeem!—if thou fearest Allah, and wouldst not disobey Ben Abir. If the treasure is to be mine, it will remain where it is till after my Sabbath; if it be not mine, the breaking of my holy day will not save it for me. What is to be, will be. Go to sleep," closed the pious Yemenite, and retired to his couch, Ibraeem, after a little natural hesitation, doing likewise. What right, after all, had he to question the deep wisdom and deeper faith of his generous master?

But sleep would not return to Ben Abir. Through the coarse goat hair texture that made up the covering of his tent the glittering mass stared at him like so many living eyes, and he felt a chill run through the marrow of his bones. While he was at a loss to explain how the glare of the hoard penetrated the opaque material of his tent, a new wonder diverted his attention. An inclined plane, broad as a valley and smooth as glass, stretched down from the deep heavens with both ends lost, one among the starry configurations, the other in the unfathomed abysses of

the nether world. The only irregularity in the sweep of the prodigious highway was a terrace which made a connecting link between the upper and the lower part of the plane. In the heart of the terrace shone the hoard which a while before had been seen before the tent.

Ben Abir doubted not that there was an evil design back of this marvelous display, but he felt safe in the consciousness of his firm loyalty. His feeling of safety, however, was somewhat shaken by a terrific detonation, like the eruption of a volcano. It was the signal for a numberless host to ascend towards the terrace, who, dividing and subdividing, started to march up in frowning armies to the sound of wailing notes,—clarions and clashing cymbals mixing with a chaos of noise produced by all the instruments of music known. The vanguard was made up of a seried division of vicious gholes whose march resembled more the dance of droll harlequins than the pace of warriors. At their heels came a vast herd of monstrous bipeds, with head, tail and hoofs of the boar, making the air shudder with their hideous grunts, and piercing the sable of

night with their grim eyes. Next followed a division of bipedal beasts, rolling fiery eyeballs, striking their sides with tails like those of lions, and rending the atmosphere with roars of fury. Back of these came bounding an enormous pack of bellowing hell-hounds, each one a Cerberus, armed with the deadly teeth and claws of the tiger. Close behind tramped an appalling herd of deformities, hunch-backed elephants, with raised trunks that were hissing serpents, and tusks which reached down to the ground tearing up fragments of rock and hurling them against the terrace with diabolic fury. The rear was taken up by a grisly multitude of animated skeletons, who yelled, grinned, laughed, danced,—drawing up and thrusting out their bony limbs with wriggling motion, and varying the infernal performance by a series of somersaults. Back of all burst a deluge of red fire which shot with raging impetuosity among the hellish monsters, who instead of being deterred appeared to derive strength from the consuming element. But fierce as was the rush against the terrace, beyond its outer limits the demons could not pass.

Meanwhile, on the upper extension of the celestial highway there was a quick mustering of radiant squadrons, and an array of embattled lines which extended beyond the remotest galaxies. The summons had gone forth to be ready for the infernal invader, and the denizens of the stars responded in unnumbered myriads. Signals flashed from height to height, and save the warning note of a trumpet faintly heard now and then, the pregnant silence of the ethereal combatants contrasted strangely with the fiendish defiance of the howling goblins.

The moments of suspense were intensified by the swelling of the hoard to amazing dimensions; not that the coins multiplied, but they grew in size and in lustre, until each one resembled the solar disk. It was no more a pile, but a pyramid, of gold set in a frame of thickening darkness.

A peal of thunder from on high was the sign for the encounter. Like a sea of lightning, the radiant vanguard swept adown the terrace with a mien so dreadful and weapons so deterring that the black divisions fled in horror before the

blasting might that shook the deeps to the foundation.

With all his attention concentrated on the engagement, Ben Abir had not seen that a cherub stood before him one of those precious disks in his hand, until the apparition spoke. "So much is thine, O, righteous Ben Abir! the rest will come," were the mystic words of the benign power.

Ben Abir could not accept the gift without stretching his arms to their full length, and found it impossible to hold it the moment his hands closed round the edge of the fiery wheel. Finding the priceless treasure was slipping from his grasp he called for Ibraeem to help.

"What is it thou wouldst have me do for thee, master?" asked the attendant when roused from his sound sleep.

"Have I called thee, Ibraeem? Yes, I did call thee; but it was all a dream, a dream as awful as the vision of Jacob in the wilderness. —How far advanced is the night? Is there anything left of the golden hoard?" inquired Ben Abir.

"The camels are astir, and the east is gray, but the gold is all gone, master,—all gone. Had we taken it, thou wouldst again be the Crœsus of Yemen," said the simple-minded Ibraeem, regretfully. "We ought to have taken it, ought we not?"

"It is well that we kept our hands from it; it was a temptation held out by the evil one, Ibraeem, who lures man into error. What is to be will be.—Let me be alone for a little space; I am somewhat perturbed," concluded Ben Abir, who wished to think over his unearthly vision.

With eyes closed, the Hebrew endeavored to recall the dark and bright phantoms of the night, pondering what it all might mean. And that hoard, which his humble servant had witnessed and referred to, had been too tangible a reality to be transferred to the domain of the spectral.

The radiant flood-gates of heaven's light-oceans opened wide. The Orient was ablaze with the glories of an early sunrise, which had been initiated by waves of gilded crimson; and Arabia Felix rose from a transcendental

dream to bathe in dew as brilliant as the pearls of Halool and Katar. The air vibrated with the joyous notes of the feathered free-booters; there were the finch, the lark and the thrush to lead in the matin concert, and the beautifully-crested hoopoe, on whom Solomon bestowed a golden crown for services rendered him in the desert and for messages carried between His Majesty and Belkeys, the Queen of Sheba. Sweet was the scent of the air, and the sparkling dew was as yet unabsorbed by the glowing heat of the rising day.

Ben Abir issued from his tent to feel that nature donned her festal robes in honor of the Sabbath blessed of the Lord. Was it not his over-soul that made him realize the holiness of God's creation? How different the world looked to him on week-days. But think of whatever he might, before his mental gaze still soared his vision undispelled by the cheer of sunshine and life. His heart throbbed with prophetic apprehension. Who was wise enough to enlighten him?

However, the day was passed in worship and study; and at the sight of the first three

stars in the firmament, the scrupulous Ben Abir bade his farewell to the Sabbath by the blessing uttered over a cup of wine; and, lantern in hand, proceeded to search the spot whereon the golden hoard had been seen on the previous night. One gold piece only he found on turning up the sand with the tip of his sandal, but it was enough to make his heart flutter, conscious that the coin in his hand was not of human make. Returning to his tent, the precious piece was deposited on a pillow with a trembling hand, when lo! the thing began to dilate and grow in brilliance, until it reached the size and shape of the golden disk he had in his vision received from an angel's hand. Ben Abir bit his thumb to assure himself that he was awake. Was it not another illusion? To the touch it was an ordinary coin; to the eye it had the form of a mighty targe of burnished gold. "It is mine, and I shall keep it as the secret and talisman of my life, a gift of the Most High, blessed be He!" whispered the loyal Israelite, and the mysterious coin was carefully wrapped up and put away.

The early dawn of the first day of the week found Ben Abir's caravan winding its way amidst a wilderness of tropic vegetation and scattered rocks; but the tide of fortune still turned against him. Torrents of rain impeded the march of his camels and damaged the goods he depended on for the success of his journey. While the dromedaries were in the act of crossing a bridge the span gave way and three of the poor brutes went down never to rise again; and to complete his ruin, fire broke out at the caravansary where he had hoped to find refuge from the weather's inclemencies, and he had good cause to be grateful even for escape from death in the flames that consumed the remnant of his merchandise, largely secured on credit. The Crœsus of Yemen found himself on the brink of poverty, a ruined man with a crowd of creditors to lodge him in one of Sanaa's abominable prisons. He knew the Kadi who would speak the sentence, and he prepared to face the inevitable, trusting that something would happen to render his painful situation bearable.

There lived at this time another person in Sanaa who actually rejoiced at the disgrace and impoverishment of Ben Abir; and this contrary both to his own temper, and to the popular sympathies with a man who in his better days alleviated human misery to the best of his ability. That exception was Hayem Cordosa. The cause of the ill feeling in Cordosa's breast was an unhappy, one-sided romance, which had driven his son, Menahem, to desperation. Until a certain morning that youth had but one dream, and that was knowledge. It was the fateful moment when he chanced to meet in the street an exquisitely lovely boy mounted on a pony in charge of a black man. The child's silken locks were darker than the jet black face of his attendant, his complexion was like milk and blood, his lips reminded one of the red coral, his teeth of the purest pearl, while his eyes suggested the dreams of angels in realms of ineffable felicity. A few questions put to the slave brought the information that infinitely fairer than the child was his elder sister Estrelia. In the glow of his loyal ad-

miration Ibraeem, who had the child in charge, portrayed to the interested youth a maiden who was more beautiful than the Peri of Yemen. So great was her beauty that her pellucid witchery shone through her veil, while her perfect form would have been envied by the graces of antiquity. Ibraeem did not think that he exaggerated matters by assuring Menahem that Estrelia's loveliness illumined the apartments of her privacy, and that her eyes would enchant the deadly *rukta*. If the youth had any doubt about it, the cherub-like sweetness of her little brother dispelled the doubt.

Menahem was not a youth to be despised. His fidelity to principle was as great as his learning in sacred literature was deep. He felt justified in offering his heart to Ben Abir's daughter, but met with a rebuff, and became desperate. The erstwhile cheerful youth grew gloomy, courted seclusion, brooded on vengeance; and finally resorted to the extremity of deserting his faith, to the great sorrow of his scrupulously religious parents. It was a mad step, but there was method in

the madness. The apostate put himself under the protection of Omar, and the learned Kadi presented him to his royal master as a convert to Islam; the Imam received him with favor, assured him of a seat in Paradise, and made him his cup-bearer. Menahem was were he wished to be, but Cordosa hated the house of Ben Abir.

It was during the last trip of the fallen Crœsus of Yemen that the convert took an opportunity to speak to the Imam of the maiden who had driven him mad, and he spoke of her as the "luminous Peri of Yemen, whose radiant beauty enlightens Ben Abir's home."

Under ordinary circumstances there was not a thing within the boundaries of his dominion the Iman would hesitate to lay hand on if he deemed its possession desirable. In this especial case the remembrance of a broken leg and dislocated jaw seemed to justify any step calculated to afford some recompense for those injuries which gave the aspirant to prophetic veneration a hideous aspect. When consulted in the matter, the Kadi failed to see it in any

other light—"Thou art the blessed re-birth of the last prophet, the prince of this great land, and there is no power in the heavens to interfere with thy right, O, commander of the faithful! when thou seest fit to save a soul from perdition. As to the increase in thy harem beyond the number consecrated by the will of Mohammed, thy servant will be grateful for any of thy Houris, if thou deignest to transfer her to the humbler home of thy devoted Kadi," was Omar's suggestion.

Had the secret remained among its originators and been carried out promptly, the fate of Estrelia would have been sealed; but the removal of one from the Imam's harem put Ayesha on her mettle. She suspected a new arrival, and, having fathomed the mind of Yemen's lord, she was alarmed at the prospect of being eclipsed by superior charms, thus forfeiting her hitherto undisputed rule; and she lost no time in apprising the right persons of Estrelia's imminent danger. Thus did it come to pass that when, led by the apostate, the minions of the prince descended on Ben Abir's unprotected home, they had to report

that their nocturnal invasion had been a failure. The "luminous peri of Yemen" had been warned in time.

For a man already under the pressure of great trials to return from a ruinous trip, and be greeted by the news of his child's disappearance, is an experience more readily imagined than described. The last visitation was too whelming even for the Job-like resignation of Ben Abir. His only comfort was his wife's assurance that Estrelia was not in the seraglio of the Imam. She had been carried away by two men in disguise through a back door, barely escaping the grasp of the vandals who knocked for admission in the front. The mother was so panic-stricken that she failed to remember the names of the persons who had come to the rescue of her child, and she had not heard from them since; but she felt sure that everything would turn out right.

In his brighter days Ben Abir would have invoked the power of his sovereign to effect the restitution of his daughter, but matters had changed, and circumstances dictated prudence on his part. Imam and Kadi were alike

interested in his ruin. To search quietly, wait patiently, hope and pray, were the only ways and means compatible with his safety. Besides, there were impatient creditors to be appeased and starvation at the door. The princely home had to be disposed of, but this afforded small relief. Whatever he touched, success was his adversary. "If I made it my business to bury the dead, not a death would for years occur in the city of Sanaa," remarked the disappointed man to his wife. The last trinket had been sold to keep the wolf away from the door, and now hunger stared his wife and child in the face. The devoted Ibraeem did his utmost to relieve the want of his master's family, but his fidelity was more of a comfort than a support. With the pride of a man who would rather die than appeal for help, Ben Abir yet had finally to yield to the entreaties of a starving wife. There remained but one thing for him to do, a bitter pill for him to swallow, and he acted like a man. Twice a year it was Cordosa's business to lead a caravan to one of Yemen's ports to exchange Arabian products for merchandise imported for the markets of the

peninsula. What he did not do on his own account he did on commission for others. The leading merchants of Sanaa charged him with the purchase of their wares, and their commissions were all entered in a book to be referred to in due time.

The resources of Ben Abir having been exhausted, he bethought himself of the precious coin he had sewed up in the hem of his coarse mantle, and he resolved to ask Cordosa to invest it for him in whatever way he should deem profitable. Curbing his pride he sought an interview with his enemy, made a frank statement of his pinching indigence, and requested Cordosa to buy for the only piece of gold he had in the world anything that could be sold in Sanaa. Ben Abir's sad plight and frankness moved Cordosa's heart, who not alone promised to do his best in the matter of business, but insisted on relieving the distress of the fallen man's family. The reconciliation was complete, and the generous commissioner set out on his journey, accompanied by the best wishes of Ben Abir, and those who expected his return with more than usual interest.

The six long lines of dromedaries of Cordosa's caravan, each file held together by a hair rope, were preceded by a snow-white donkey of the best breed in Hasa, good luck being insured by that philosophic animal who gave Balaam a lesson. To the left of the sagacious quadruped rode the regular guide, a Bedouin who felt at home in the trackless waste; to the right, astride of a fine steed, was the *Karawan-Bashi*,—the caravan commander,—a gorgeous display of gaudy trimmings, trappings, jingling bells and tassels, in which, however, he was greatly eclipsed by the leading ass. At the *Bashi's* left side dangled a sword of Damascus, sheathed in a scabbard; and his warlike temper was formidably impressed on all whom it concerned by a spear of unusual length. Behind these three leaders, varying in their capacity, on his horse came Cordosa, the master of the caravan. Between the guide and the *Karawan-Bashi* there was a tacit understanding to while away the monotony of the trip by tales of adventure in the desert, which they told with startling vividness, each one managing to pose as the hero of some thrilling episode.

After the usual number of days, and the accidents incidental to a journey through inhospitable regions, Cordosa reached the point of his destination. Here the unexpected happened to the experienced commissioner. Following his memoranda, he left no detail of business unattended to, except the order of Ben Abir, which he had omitted to enter on his book. As the caravan was on the point of proceeding homeward, Cordosa remembered Ben Abir's request, and felt guilty of neglect. Full of self-reproach, he turned to the *Karawan-Bashi* and required him to hurry to the bazaar and buy for the gold piece he gave him anything he thought profitable or useful. The order was carried out to the letter, to the great mortification of Cordosa. The *Karawan-Bashi* happened to meet a sailor, who had a cage full of Angola cats for sale, and proposing to strike a bargain, offered the gold piece in exchange for the feline colony, was taken at his word, and thus possessed himself of the freaky live-stock. The sailor's tale was brief. The animals had kept a large vessel free of mice, the ship had foundered, the seaman

saved the cats. He had nothing to live on. It was a straight story. The vendor had the gold and Cordosa the cats. The only thing to be done was to take the feline company along.

Again the unexpected happened to Cordosa. For many days everything went on without a hitch, when the *Karawan-Bashi* and the guide informed him that the high-land they were traversing was entirely unknown to them, and that they did not know how they had come into it. "What I see around me I have never before seen, and I have led a hundred caravans athwart the width and breadth of Yemen," asserted the most experienced guide, and the *Bashi* shook his head significantly.

"And have you perceived the singular fact, that though the country hereabout resembles the garden of Eden, we have this long day not seen a single sign of life," said Cordosa, not undisturbed in his mind.

"Allah achbar! what sea is it there we are drawing nearer to?" asked the *Bashi* in alarm. —"A big water in the mountain!"

"By the beard of the Prophet, how can a big water climb up a mountain?" ejaculated the astonished guide.

"What you see is no water, but a heavy fog, which looks like water," corrected Cordosa, much surprised however at the phenomenal denseness of the cloud.

"True, it is a fog; but I have never seen one that looked so much like a rolling tide threatening to engulf us. Everything that is alive seems to have fled before we entered this region," observed the guide, apprehensively.

And a strange fog it was, which rolled forward like a tidal wave, and ere long buried the caravan in a cloud so dense that one could not see his own feet, and the men became alarmed lest they go down unwarned over the brink of some precipice. The camels were allowed to grope their way, the guide having given up the idea of guiding; and the long string of animals progressed slowly amidst a flood of vapor with nothing to vary the nerve-trying suspense for fully an hour. Everything and everybody was soaked by the moisture; the air did not stir, and the stillness was op-

pressive. At last there was a rift in the hitherto impenetrable mass; and when a breeze lifted the fog, Cordosa rubbed his eyes to assure himself of being awake.

"Dost thou see what I see?" asked he of the *Karawan-Bashi.*

"And what dost thou see, O, man, who hast traversed the Red Desert?" asked in turn the *Bashi* of the guide.

"I see, high up, a city of marble palaces with roofs of silver and balconies of gold, as glorious as Balbec and Chilminar," cried the guide, enthusiastically.

"That is what I see; we have been lured into the domain of the genii, and harm will betide us if we fail to evade their crafty wiles," answered the *Bashi*, nervously.

"If we do not flee the malicious *Div* will hurl us into one of those bottomless chasms which swarm with venomous serpents," warned the guide.

"Try we to retrace our course, or the bird of prey and the hyena will pick the flesh from our bones," said the *Bashi*, in a mood of dark prophecy.

"Is it not God who rules this world and the stars? How can you be sure that evil will befall us if we enter that place? We are men of faith and stout hearts, and I propose that we proceed toward that dazzling city, no matter who they be who inhabit it," was Cordosa's fearless proposition.

"Thou shalt not find me craven if there be danger to face. The point of this spear has been buried in the body of the lion, and this heel has bruised the head of the *rukta;* if there be the evil one, I will face him," exclaimed the *Karawan-Bashi.*

"Neither is thy guide of the stuff that shrinks before spectres, however monstrous. Let us know them who have built that marvelous city," cried the guide heroically, and toward the city the caravan advanced.

It was that hour of the day when the lengthened shadows indicate the descent of the glowing orb, but the striking absence of bird or insect in a quarter where every inducement for their presence was to be seen in abundance gave the surroundings an air of desolation, and produced the sensation expe-

rienced by him who suddenly lights on a corpse. A broad avenue shaded by treble lines of orange trees in blossom, diffusing delicious odors, led up to a high portal giving admission to a vast enclosure walled by gray stones perfectly fitted by masterful hands, a fortress looking as new as though the masons had just given it the finishing touch. The wall was not high enough to hide the gorgeous edifices within; but the wayfarers pricked their ears in vain to catch a sound of life, the quiet being that of the graveyard. "This is a dead city," observed the guide, in the hope of shaking the courage of Cordosa; "peradventure the desolate city built by the son of Ad."

"They are not dead at night who are dead during the day," added the *Karawan-Bashi*, with a similar object in view.

"God is strong enough to afford us protection against all evil powers. Here may be a mystery we are destined to solve. Knock at the gate for admission," ordered Cordosa peremptorily.

"*Allah illaha il Allah!*" cried the *Bashi*,

seized with a fit of unflinching heroism; "I will knock at the gate with my scabbard, be the place under the rule of grim Monkir; the faithful need not be afraid of the creatures of Eblis."

The rap on the gate gave forth a hollow sound in response, yet the gateway opened with a jar, revealing a scene at which the intruders gazed with amazement. Sheddad's garden of Irem could hardly equal the vernal luxuriance which hid the foundations of the wonderful buildings. Scattered here and there, among delightful flower-beds and thick clusters of the luscious vine, stood groups of fairies motionless, so handsome that their cheeks rivaled the rose in sweetness. They were all barefooted, their little feet resembling those of children. For headgear they wore crowns of golden hair; their garb was a transparent gauze, shining like moonlight, and bespangled with gold, and they were all armed with spears of that precious metal. Awful was their silence, their expression yet showing an intense anxiety to utter speech. The gate slammed to with its jarring note as soon as

the last camel was within the precincts, and the Yemenites shuddered at the realization of their being locked in a dead city. Overcome by the awe of the surroundings, Cordosa exclaimed: "Great Lord, protect us!" Hereupon the whole mountain experienced a tremor, shared by the life-like fairies, who appeared to shiver at the mention of the Supreme.

It being sunset, Cordosa directed the *Bashi* and the guide to take the caravan to the nearest khan, and the next moment the travellers entered a caravansary, compared to which the Asaad Pasha of Damascus is but an insignificant hostelry. They found the gate ajar, and within there was plenty of provender, and a playing fountain to quench the thirst of man and brute. A sumptuous divan furnished with the most costly rugs of silk, and such seats as are only reserved for caliphs, tempted the Arabs to rest their weary limbs, while the odors of savory viands betrayed the neighborhood of a culinary institution of the highest order. Following the scent they entered a prodigious banquet hall of imperial splendor. On low

tables a royal feast was set in glittering crystal under covers of gold. On the right side of each service lay a golden rod not unlike the sceptre of a king. Scores of fairies stood around in the attitude of attendants eager to serve, but stiff and lifeless as mummies, dead beauty radiating from their faces of immaculate purity.

Hunger yielded to temptation, and the *Bashi's* example was followed by the others, except Cordosa who, lost in wonder, would not avail himself of the magnificent hospitality impliedly offered by beings who to all appearances were dead; if not dead then strangely enchanted for some unaccountable purpose.

Neither had the others time to appease the cravings of their appetites; for no sooner was the first dish uncovered than a multitudinous rustling, tripping and squeaking caused the astonished guests to turn their eyes toward the door, when lo, and behold!—thick swarms of silvery mice came rushing and tumbling one over the other, and, flying up the limbs of the horrified men, as squirrels are often seen to run up trees, they devoured in

the twinkling of an eye whatever had been laid bare to their voracity. The sumptuous banquet was turned into a scene of horror and disgust, the more so since the pests seemed heedless of those who were present, and callous to the blows which were dealt them with the golden rods that were apparently there for that purpose. "Bring the cats hither," commanded Cordosa. And as the cage was brought forth and opened the cats leapt forth like tigers wild for prey. But nimble as pussy is, the agility of her game left her without a chance to do mischief. Quick as the vermin had appeared, they much more quickly disappeared, as though the swarms had been nothing but flitting shadows.

Before it was possible to restore the animals to their cage, Cordosa and his subordinates were not only startled by the sudden animation of the fairies in the banquet hall, but a muffled roar, as of a victorious army without, made them feel instinctively that a great change had come over the dwellers of the magic city. It was a tumult that stirred the air far and wide, was echoed and re-echoed,

until the hills were vocal with the ringing vibrations of countless voices, and before a question could be asked, in marched a legion of those admirable creatures, who but a little before had been seen in a state of inanimation. Arraying themselves in military form, they presented arms and made a profound salaam in evident honor of Cordosa, thus acknowledging his title to their respect. With that unfailing politeness, which is the exquisite quality of the refined Oriental, the Hebrew begged to be informed why he was made the object of this distinguished attention. "Because thou hast broken the spell which for many hundred years held the denizens of this city enthralled by enchantment," was the answer.

There was a genial affability in the demeanor of the child-like representatives of the city's population, so that the fear of their being malicious genii vanished, and a confiding intercourse took the place of shrinking suspicion. The story they told of their origin and subsequent enchantment is one of romance, necromancy, and dire vengeance. It is briefly as follows:

Lilithiana, the Peri-Queen of the mountains of Yemen, had, in ages gone by, been wooed by the then two mighty magicians of Africa, known as El Akbor and Metemhagi. El Akbor was dreaded as the master of all the rodent species, which he had often sent on expeditions of destruction to avenge wrongs or to satisfy malice. There was no escape from the instruments of his ire. Persons and property were bitten, torn, and destroyed according to his order. The only power he feared was Metemhagi, who ruled all the feline tribes, and could be appealed to against the plague his rival was in a position to inflict. Long and assiduous was the courtship of the twain necromancers, and the love-contest closed with Lilithiana's declared preference for Metemhagi.

The Peri-Queen controlled the untold wealth hidden in the mountains of her domain, was mistress of all the genii within the bounds of her empire, and concluded to build an enchanted city accessible to none but her progeny. A host of her aerial subjects received orders to carry out their Queen's behest, and

the city of marble, silver and gold was the result of one hour's workmanship. Hither the queenly Peri retired with her mortal adorer, and an impenetrable zone of cloud was thrown around the region that had the weird city as its centre.

Lilithiana was not long to enjoy her marital felicity. Her intimacy with a mortal deprived her of the power over Yemen's genii; and the angel, who centuries before had expelled her from Paradise for a slight trespass, descended to inform her that her sin would be visited on her guiltless offspring, her own punishment being exile and separation from her dear ones. Aware of the Peri's fall and disgrace, El Akbor assumed the deterring form of a monstrous rat and, embracing his opportunity, threw himself among the genii of Lilithiana's realm during a dance in the moonlight. The shock transformed them into a swarm of silvery mice, and the magician having thus gained power over them, uttered another incantation, causing the whilom airy beings to raven with an insatiate hunger. This gluttony made them the terror of Lilithiana's de-

scendants, who were doomed hereafter to live only from sunset to sunrise, held by witch-craft the rest of the time in a death-like trance.

Metemhagi's devotion to his fairest of consorts made it impossible for him to part with her whose tender passion for him had caused her fall and banishment, and his absence enabled the diabolical Akbor to accomplish his purpose. Informed of the outrage, Metemhagi hurried to the spot as fast as the fleetest tiger could carry him, but found that the spell was to last until, prompted by a higher power, the intrusion of man with that feline species of whom the rodents are in terror should break the magic thrall, and restore matters to their original condition. This having happened, the disenchantment of the enthralled inhabitants of the superb city was followed by that of the genii who had been changed to mice. Lilithiana's return to majesty came next. Widowed and humiliated, she had hovered for centuries on the borders of her beloved empire till Cordosa's arrival in her city changed the aspect of things, and she was the Peri-Queen once more.

Hitherto the nocturnal revelers could not indulge their feast without beating off the pestilent vermin with one hand while eating with the other; it was the first time that the banquet was being enjoyed in daylight, and without the use of the erstwhile indispensable weapon. The viands served appeared as inexhaustible as the multitudes who entered the dining hall to pay their respects to Cordosa, regale themselves, and file off again. Nor was music wanting to enliven conviviality. The charming attendants ravished the souls of the throng with song so sweet that the strangers had difficulty to prevent their eyelids from closing, lulled into obliviousness by the dulcet melody. At last Cordosa alone remained awake; the rest had succumbed to the irresistible charm of the bewitching voices. The honors showered on Cordosa were worthy of a great deliverer. In a palanquin of the most precious metal, studded with brilliant jewels, seated on cushions softer than air, he was carried through the festively decked boulevards and paradisial gardens, among dazzling palaces and amid the joyous ovations of jubilant crowds.

And as soon as the sun had withdrawn his last mellow beam from the crests of the mountains, unearthly splendors burst over the magic city. The spectacle was one of ghostly awe and august magnificence. A splendid illumination shed a flood of light on towering edifices and their resplendent decorations. In a second, grand triumphal arches spanned every highway, woven of the Orient's most exuberant foliage, flowers and blossoms, each one strewed thickly with the delicate petals of all the roses in creation, and the delighted denizens were transfigured in the reflex of the weird effulgence. Expectation sat visible on every face, and the reason became manifest when the faint vibration of a dreamy music came floating on the balmy breeze from the lower end of the main boulevard. The disenchanted genii celebrated their deliverance, and prepared to welcome their Peri-Queen, whose time had come to return from her banishment to rule, surrounded by those whose image kept her lover's memory green. The event was to be commemorated by a transcendent jubilee.

The Queen's cavalry opened the triumphal

entry with a division of diminutive and luminous horsemen, armed with golden spears, mounted on tiny zebras not larger than kittens, and blowing trumpets not unlike the calyx of the white lily. In an instant their files flew up the first triumphal arch, with no more effort than a bird makes when he hops from one twig to another. From their lofty position they watched the advance of the Queen's artillery, a glittering train of golden cannon, mortars and howitzers, on silver carriages, pulled by little white elephants whose drivers in lustrous uniform swelled the chorus by bugles which varied the harmony with great effect. An inclined span thrown by the vanguard to the top of an arch served as a road to an elevated platform, where the ordnance was put in position, loaded and pointed in every direction of the compass. Beneath came the body of the great army, battalion on battalion, ascending and occupying in succession arch after arch, until the vernal displays bristled and blazed with the gorgeousness of the shining host. A translucent haze like a veil of atomized jewels floated in the atmosphere, re-

flecting the hues of the rainbow; and a thousand bands accompanied a chorus as numerous as the voices of the entire army and population.

Cordosa's tears flowed freely; the symphony proved too much for his heart. The pageant around him looked like a dream of blessed childhood. He had neither time to feel nor to think. The chorus sang the prelude to the entrance of the Peri-Queen. Wrapped in a cloud as intensely bright, as though the moon's light had been concentrated within a radius of a few leagues, Lilithiana entered the gate of her own city. Jubilant hurrahs greeted her and reverberated a thousandfold throughout the hills. As the queenly train drew nearer, Cordosa discerned in the heart of the mass of light a gliding chariot drawn by twelve fiery steeds as white as the blaze around them. In reclining ease Lilithiana rested on pillows of gossamer apparently filled out with light. Her golden hair hung like a beam of mild sunshine, leaving a countenance free, which with its star-like eyes left no hope for mortal beauty to equal it. Of lesser witchery yet unmatched by flesh however fair were her nine attend-

ing nymphs, who in another equipage rode behind their mistress, each one holding a bag full of precious coin. The glorious pageant closed with a division of brilliantly mounted guards on stags with golden hoofs and antlers.

What was the sensation of Cordosa on perceiving that the Peri-Queen had her eyes riveted upon him. Before the spot he occupied her chariot stopped. Without alighting from her royal seat, Lilithiana spoke thus to the astonished man:

"Not so much to thee, O, Cordosa, do we owe our restoration, and our children their disenchantment, as to the righteous Ben Abir whose faith and reverence frustrated the designs of the evil one. Temptation lured him in vain, and trials failed to weaken his trust in Eternal Justice. Yet hast thou done thy share to deepen his misery. Why knows he not where his daughter hides? Art thou not afraid of retribution? Lead his child to his heart. And behold!—these nine bags of gold are destined for him. Take them hence and deliver them untouched as his meed for virtues

rare among men. His cause is in higher hands; they who injured him will suffer."

The air was rent with cries of applause, and the triumphal chariot proceeded onward. Filing down from the arches, the army stood in marching order, and followed in grand parade. The discharge of artillery shook the air; the musicians played, and the pageant moved on and out of sight, except the column of moonlight, which faded slowly in the hazy distance. The palatial buildings burst out with radiance from within, and the happy crowds abandoned themselves to feasting and dancing.

Cordosa's first business now was to load the dromedaries with the treasure intended for Ben Abir. At the khan he found it almost impossible to awaken his men. When the *Karawan-Bashi* finally opened his eyes, he looked stupid as an ox and talked as if he had lost his senses. The guide was similarly affected. The Arabs seemed deaf and dumb, and Cordosa felt alarmed at their state of torpitude. When all his efforts to raise them failed, he bethought himself of the fountain and grasped a vessel with the intention of

throwing cold water on the dull company. But the fountain was gone. Cordosa turned toward the door of the superb Divan, where they had spent hours on the previous day; there was neither a hall nor a door to be seen, and a sudden dimness had made all things uncertain. Still more disturbed by the startling situation, Cordosa tried to grope his way into the room of whose nearness he was sure, but, instead of striking one of the cushioned seats, he struck his head against the bark of a tree. Awaiting once more some unexpected change he strained his eyes to discern some object; and failing in the effort, knelt down to ascertain the nature of the ground he was on. Cold sand, gravel, and wet grass apprised him of surroundings other than those he had supposed to be about him. While fear was gaining on him, a passing wind raised the fog, and his astonished eye was sweeping in vain in search for the enchanted—or disenchanted—city.

The sun was just throwing out his multicolored couriers to inform continents of his coming. A further effort to awaken his men

proved successful, and Cordosa's next care was to discover whether the cats were in their cage, and whether the gold bags made a part of what he doubted not was a dream's phantom. His consternation was great when he found the cage empty, and counted nine bags full to overflowing of the precious metal. Calling on the *Karawan-Bashi* and the guide, he thought it was time to proceed homeward. "We have dreamed long enough," said he for a purpose.

"Yes, master, there must be some tricksy *Div* hereabout; I have a jumble in my head. I could swear by Allah that we have been in a grand city and have witnessed queer things," said the *Bashi*, with a yawn.

"By the beard of the Prophet, *Bashi*, the demon has blown something of that sort into my own brain," asserted the guide. The others said nothing. The caravan pursued its way, and Cordosa had his eyes on the camels that bore the enormous treasure. Sanaa was reached in safety. None of the men noticed the disappearance of the cats.

Immediately after his arrival Cordosa dis-

patched two trusty persons to his country retreat, and they returned with a third in a disguise which rendered identification impossible. He then sent for Ben Abir and insisted on being informed as to how he had come into possession of the mysterious coin that he had given him to invest. Filled with unutterable wonder at what he heard, Cordosa emptied one bag of gold after the other, asking each time whether the pile he had refrained from touching on the specified Friday eve had been as large as the one before him. Not before the contents of the ninth bag had been added to the heap, did Ben Abir exclaim, "So large, and not larger."

"Then take all this, and be once more the Crœsus of Yemen, O, righteous Ben Abir!" cried Cordosa, and supplemented his words by the tale of the phantom city. It was Ben Abir's turn to be overwhelmed by astonishment. "And now has thy time come to be perfectly happy," added Cordosa, knowing the contrary to be the case.

"Alas, Ben Abir's happiness will never, never return!—My daughter,—my daughter!" lamented the disconsolate father.

"Even thy daughter returns with thy fortune," said Cordosa, and disappeared through the door, which led to his private apartments. Another minute and the lost Estrelia lay sobbing in her father's arms. Ben Abir was a happy man, but the other felt that he owed his friend an explanation, which was substantially as follows.

When the jealous Ayesha had learned of the Imam's intention to glorify his harem by the incomparable loveliness of Ben Abir's daughter, she lost no time in warning Cordosa of the maiden's danger. Knowing that his recreant son was at the bottom of the infamous scheme, he felt himself called upon to frustrate it. But once in possession of the girl, whose charms had lost him his son, Cordosa hoped against hope to effect a change in her feelings toward the desperate Menahem. The plan did not work. Estrelia detested the youth who had worshipped her, but was told that her safety required her removal to a hiding place. Cordosa was maturing a new plan when the supernatural incidents of his last journey left him no choice. The Peri-Queen

must be obeyed, lest misfortune betide his house.

Cordosa asked Abir's forgiveness, pointing to the great anguish of heart the love affair had caused him. The Crœsus of Yemen, recognizing the higher hand that fashioned his destiny, would not have his friend refer to it hereafter. "I would to God I could heal thy wound, O, kind-hearted Cordosa. My gratitude and sympathy are thine, and if a part of this hoard will give thee ease, be it thine also," replied Ben Abir.

But Cordosa would not entertain the thought of being rewarded for services he had rendered accidentally, while Lilithiana's warning not to touch the gold was fresh in his memory.

As the two much tried men were considering the best way of conveying the treasure quietly to the house of its owner, Ibraeem knocked at the door. When admitted, the man could scarcely speak for excitement. "The Imam is dead!" cried the liberated slave out of breath.

"The Imam dead!—Who killed him?"

asked Cordosa, sure that death had not come peacefully,—else why that commotion ?

"He killed both the Imam and the Kadi," supplemented Ibraeem, "He ran amuck."

"Who is he ?" asked Ben Abir with pardonable impatience.

"Menahem Cordosa," breathed the slave, betraying a delicacy of feeling slaves are not credited with. Cordosa grew faint, and was caught in the arms of Ben Abir.

"Menahem Cordosa an assassin !" mourned the stricken parent. "It is well that it ended as it did," added Cordosa, having recovered his composure. "Take your hoard, friend, and may thy house prosper."

"Dost thou remember to have ever seen this heap of coin ?" asked Ben Abir, seeing Ibraeem's eyes fascinated by the shining pile.

"That is the gold we saw that Friday eve before thy tent," replied Ibraeem.

"Yes, Ibraeem, and then I told thee that what is to be will be. This all goes to our house, thine not less than mine, faithful Ibraeem, who shall live to the end of thy days with the Crœsus of Yemen," said the grateful Ben Abir.

THE FATE OF ARZEMIA.

THE FATE OF ARZEMIA.

IN the ninth year of his rule Chosroes Nushirvan, the conqueror of kingdoms, sat one day on his gem-incrusted throne, surrounded by all the symbols of earthly majesty. The room was the famous, star-bespangled hall of state in his celebrated palace at Ctesiphon, his capital, an edifice so large that on this occasion the entire division of his dreaded "fifty thousand golden spears" were required to draw a cordon around its enclosure in the heart of that splendid city on the bank of the Tigris. Dazzling jewels, exquisite art, weird magnificence, and incalculable wealth characterized the imperial scene. The golden throne stood on a prodigious carpet of silk, embroidered in imitation of a semi-tropical garden,—plant, leaf and blossom being

artistically reproduced in gems of all hues, from the emerald to the sparkling diamond and sapphire. The vaulted hall represented a miniature firmament adorned with golden spheres responding by an operation of machinery to the motions of the planets and the signs of the zodiac. Chosroes was enclosed in a brilliant coat of mail, and his hand rested on a sword bedecked with jewels of untold value. His crown was so heavy that in order to sustain its priceless weight, a golden chain held it suspended over the head of Iran's invincible lord. On a lower seat at his right hand sat the venerable *Zarathustrotema*, the primate of all the sun-worshippers, the high-priest of the high-priests; while before the throne stood in servile attitude the chiefs and servitors of his court, prepared to sink prostrate at the nod of the autocrat.

As many eyes as there were in the hall threw furtive glances at the contracted brows of the arbitrary monarch, whose discordant mood was evident. Whether it was anger, melancholy, or despair, remained to be seen; there was no beam in his face to relieve the

gloom. Why that ill-humor on a day dedicated to festive joy? For it was the seventh day after the birth of a royal babe, the day set for the naming and blessing of his newborn child. But the mighty lord of Iran had for six days and nights been stirred by the vivid picture of a dream which caused his blood to run cold as often he recalled its horrifying incidents. His vision was unlike that of Nebuchadnezzar, who saw a human form fashioned of various metals shattered by a fragment of rock. Chosroes thought that he was roaming through one of his delightful gardens, teeming with singing birds and delicious fruits, musing over the great victories he had won, and the hoards which filled his vaults with enormous wealth, enabling him to rival the Great Mughul in the luxuries of his court. His only worthy enemy was Rome, and even her power seemed to bend to his will. Might, pomp, royal ease and love were his,—what remained for him to attain but the rule of the entire world? "First Rome, then India!" cried he. But lo! what is that? A grim *tower of silence* so near his marble palace,

how did it come there? He had never seen it there ere this. The towers of silence, where the fire-worshippers expose their dead to be denuded of flesh by carrion vultures, earth being too sacred to be polluted by the decay of human flesh, are usually located in remote groves, preferably on hills haunted by the carnivorous bird; here was one in the vicinity of the royal palace,—since when?—and by whose order built?

Chosroes turned his eyes toward the top of the dismal building to account for the voracious swarm of vultures that circled around it, as though a corpse had been there deposited, and great was his horror to see the flock make towards him. In his confusion he tore a twig from a tree to beat off the pest; blood flowed from the tree thus wounded; the obscene swarm disappeared, the tower vanished, and when he looked at the twig in his hand, he soon accounted for its great weight by finding it to be a sceptre of gold, adorned by leaves of resplendent stones. Then he became conscious of a ravening hunger, which to satisfy, Chosroes put forth his arm to pick the nearest

fruit; his touch petrified it into a transparent jewel. Repeated attempts had the same result. Tormented by hunger, the king sent his eye in every direction in the hope of help. Redoubled terror seized him on perceiving that the entire garden turned into a wilderness of blinding glitter. A lamenting breeze passed through the lifeless masses of stiffened green frozen into stone,—tree, fruit and blossom fiercely reflecting the glare of the sun. The wind was the only thing that moved, whining like a ghost that passed to eternal perdition. Thirst followed hunger; the deluded victim turned to a cool spring to find the precious liquid therein crystalized into solid diamonds.

"*Ahura-Mazda*, if this be an evil work of the *devas*, then send *Vohu Mano*, *Ashem* and *Armaiti* to lead me into thy light! O, thou who didst create my being in accordance with thy wisdom!" prayed the humbled Shah, consumed by the double torment of hunger and thirst.

A diabolical laugh made the nightmare hideous; it came from a monstrous shape hidden behind a tree, a winged dragon with the

head of a man, the head of one in the royal family. Recoiling from that frightful apparition, Chosroes tried to flee, but was intercepted by the same flock of carrion fowl who, returning, lighted on him like so many fiends, lifting him bodily from the ground, and carried him to the funereal grating on the top of the tower of silence, which seemed to have again cropped up from the ground. The agony of being torn to pieces roused him from the horrid nightmare, breathing heavily and trembling all over.

The first object that met his eyes was the court master-of-ceremonies, who, with arms folded and head inclined, informed his majesty of a new royal birth. Shirin, the envied and most favored sultana of his thousands of wives, had the selfsame night been delivered of a female child, as beautiful as is the blushing cheek of *Arustra*. The coincidence of a child's birth with what he could not help accepting as a portent of some catastrophe to come was not to be dismissed by a Zarathustrian to whom the whole universe was one vast battlefield contested by the hostile armies

of Ormuzd the good, and Ahriman the evil. Yet instead of consulting the wisdom of the Magi, high-priests unerring in their interpretations of dreams and casting of nativities, Chosroes had concluded to wait until the seventh day after the confinement when it is the custom of the votaries of Zarathustra to have the child named by a priest, and its horoscope cast. That there might be no preconcerted deception practiced by the shrewd Magi, a secret order had been issued by the king to three different fire-temples, far apart, for the head of the local priesthood to report at court on a day named, and the Zarathustrotema received a call of a similar nature. Thus did it come about that the throne-hall of Chosroes Nushirvan wore that awful solemnity of pregnant suspense which passed down from the head of the empire to those who stood uninformed and powerless at the foot of his throne.

"Know thou, great head of Iran's light-worship, whom Ahura-Mazda illumined, that my calling thee hither has a high purpose to be presently divulged. From the fire-temples

of Ardashir and Kanjak I had the wisest *dasturs* summoned to appear before me this day to read the stars in behalf of a little daughter to be named Arzemia. Chosroes Nushirvan ordains it that his daughter's horoscope be cast this hour by three of the wisest Magi, each one unknown to and unenlightened by the other. Thy presence, Zarathustrotema, shall wisdom add to wisdom, should some deep remain unfathomed," spoke the ruler in a nervous voice.

Hereupon a venerable priest was ushered into the royal presence. After paying the proper homage, the Magian unrolled a parchment bedecked with hieroglyphics, drew various lines thereon with a rod in his hand, then, with his eyes turned toward the zodiacal figures set in motion on the firmament of the hall, he began:

"The god-stars under whose auspices thy new-born child came to this world show me a field of light on a background of impenetrable night. I see a career of strength and beauty, beams of sunshine swallowed by seas of darkness. The god-stars favor Arzemia, O king,

with more than woman's grace and royal fame. Among immortal queens thy daughter will stand high; but length of years *Mazda* denies her; lest she rule and build, like Semiramis, Ninevehs, Babylons, hanging gardens, and towers piercing the skies. With her, Iran's might and fame will blossom new, but there is a floating chaos back of all,—red lightning, bleeding armies, wrecked kingdoms and fallen thrones. The god-stars reveal an era of triumph, drawing up one of crime, tears, woe, blood and ruin."

The next horoscoper assumed the air of one entranced by the adumbrations of his dark prophecy, which ran thus: "The powers of *Angro Maniyush* stand arraigned against the seed of Chosroes Nushirvan. Born under Cleopatra's constellation, the child named Arzemia will exceed Egypt's enchantress in the quality which makes woman sovereign, and the witchery which makes kings her slaves. A dark veil hides the rest; let it remain unlifted.—Iran's destiny breaks on my vision in streaks of splendor dimmed by thunder-clouds rising from the eternal abyss."

"Arzemia's fate," cried the third prophet of evil, "is intertwined with that of the Sasanian dynasty. Like Tadmor's queen, she will rule over a mighty empire in combat with one yet mightier. But not like Zenobia's will be the end of her career. Trembling seizes me as I behold Iran's great tragedy, which *Ahura-Mazda* wrote in the book of fate, preceded by an era of triumphs unequalled in the Orient's tale. In the distance I hear the evil spirits whisper things to come, which my lips shall not articulate. Why conjure night while the sun is at his zenith?—Rome is not thy deadliest foe, O, Chosroes Nushirvan; beware of a serpent in thy bosom."

The echo of "in thy bosom" vibrated in the monarch's ear, the silence of the throne-hall being unbroken by a breath, so fearful was the impression left by the weird astrologers. With ill-disguised alarm Chosroes turned his look on the face of the Zarathustrotema, whose mien betrayed evidence of anxiety.

"Why sees the one not what the other sees, the god-stars being there unchanged? They prophesy a queenship like three others and

unlike,—where the congruity? Lift up the veil, that certainty dispel all doubt. If Persia's downfall be decreed on high let the horoscope be unambiguous; give me truth," commanded the autocrat.

"When, since Zarathustra's blessed age, did *Ahura-Mazda* bestow of his purest light on a mortal, O, king of kings? The god-stars foreshadow our fate, they do not unequivocally foretell it; and man may well be grateful for the doubt that leaves hope to feed his dreams. Horoscopy shows that the zodiacal signs under which Arzemia beheld light indicate qualities of sovereignty common to those three famous queens, leaving much unsolved to cherish bright probabilities. Benign *Mazda*, lest impending evil mar the joy of the happier hour, withholds the secrets of futurity from our eye. Let not, I beseech thee, future events overcast thy glorious horizon. Proceed with thy triumphant march, while we, guardians of the sacred fires, pray for the success of thy arms. If fall we must, then let us fall great. Let thine empire grow with Arzemia, her mind be irradiated by the wisdom of Zara-

thustra, and her heart be stirred by the emulation of Babylon's immortal queen," closed the primate of Iran appealingly.

With an irrepressible presentiment dominating his being, Chosroes sought relief in the vortex of a reckless activity, and his still swelling tide of fortune began to weaken the apprehension that he was laboring under the frown of unauspicious god-stars. His cupidity seemed to grow with the incessant influx of treasure sent by the chiefs of his victorious armies, largely engaged against the forces of the Roman emperor, Heraclius, and nothing was too costly which tended to gratify his fondness for display.

The dreaded auxiliaries of the Persian army were several cohorts of drilled elephants. Each division ot troops had its elephantine accompaniment, but the fifty thousand "golden spears" relied for effective pioneer work on fifty of those prodigious tramplers led by a white mammoth called Mahmud, the same who, in times bygone, carried the Ethiopian king, Abraba, when he invaded Mecca. Mahmud was elevated to the rank of a general,

and he acted his part with a dignity and a foresight worthy of a distinguished strategist. His command was trained to follow their chief in all he did, to eject volumes of water and mud, stored up for the purpose in their capacious receptacles, into the eyes of the enemy; to use the proboscis to good advantage, to crush out life and to break the serried files of an advancing foe. Mahmud's onslaughts paved the way for many a victory, and no officer of Iran's great army enjoyed more consideration and affection than that intelligent brute. Whether at home or in the camp, Mahmud's quarters and attendants were as sumptuous as those of the other generals, while his gold-bestrewed robe was of the finest silk, and embroidered with precious stones.

With this inbreaking engine, of a resistless momentum, as a wedge for an enormous host, swelled by new levies and animated by dashing generals, Chosroes Nushirvan not only wrested Asia Minor from the Roman grip, but had his banner carried as far as Libya, Egypt and Carthage. In the ample vaults of his white palace the insatiate king received and

hoarded the spoils of nations, exhibiting only valueless trophies for the edification of the populace and a disaffected nobility. In his domestic relations the lord of Iran was an unjust father, a tyrant, a poltroon, and a pompous braggart, owing his power and prestige to the bravery of his generals; but conspiracy was lurking where he least suspected it.

The stir and clash of armies and the overthrow of kingdoms did not disturb the early childhood of Arzemia, who, in the retreats of the imperial harem, blossomed into adorable maidenhood, endowed with talents of the highest order and a thirst for knowledge seldom heard of in Oriental courts. Infatuated with his charming daughter, Chosroes lavished treasures in surrounding her with all the luxuries of a queen, and provided a staff of wise heads to imbue her with the essence of Zarathustrian, not less than secular, wisdom. At the age of sixteen Arzemia astonished the court by her appearance at her father's side in the hall of audience. Robed in a purple dress, with a blaze of gems in the shape of a heart on her left breast, and a sparkling tiara

on her head, the enthroned princess looked more like a goddess than a maiden prematurely developed. To the courtiers at the foot of the throne she appeared an image of a dream, perfect in form, ineffably beautiful, and divinely self-sufficient, her eyes darting those arrows which strike the incurable wound.

It was a great gala day. Among the trophies laid before the throne, was the true cross brought by the famous general who had taken Jerusalem; and a slip-shod envoy from the interior of Arabia was to be heard,—the main object, however, being the debut of Shirin's adorable daughter.

"Is it homage or tribute that thou bringest hither from my slaves in Arabia?" asked Chosroes of an uncombed Bedouin in sluttish habit.

In lieu of answer, the Arab impassively delivered a missive in writing, and gave no sign that the splendor of the scene overawed him. Translated, the message read: "In the name of the most merciful God! Mohammed, son of Abdallah and apostle of God, to Chosroes Nushirvan, king of Persia—"

"Hold, fool! What do I hear! Does a savage slave of the desert dare put his name before mine in writing?" cried the autocrat in great anger, seizing the document and tearing it to pieces.—"Get this dog out of my sight, and write to my satrap in Yemen that there lives a madman in Medina who claims to be a prophet; if he cannot cure him, let him send me his head."

With this incident closed a scene that had been fraught with vast consequence for Iran, and with not less significance for Arzemia. Henceforth visions different from those that haunted her brain in the harem's privacy invaded her imagination. There had been eyes in the hall of a glow and a sympathy so passionately contagious that the entire being seemed irrevocably absorbed in that enchanting look. It was a woman's first passion, which she was unable to analyze. Before that event her active spirit, if not engaged in fathoming the mysteries of Zarathustra, delighted in the weaving of fantastic tissues, with heroes and heroines as the forerunners of her future greatness. Destined by the god-stars to

wear a crown, what, with Iran as her heritage, could prevent her from eclipsing the achievements of Semiramis? The entire world then lay prostrate at her feet; kings and Cæsars would worship her. Why not rather be a goddess than the mate of a mortal, even if he be a Ninus, an Antony, or an Odenatus? Why not shine like blessed *Mithra*, who illumines the heavens unmated? "Be one man's inferior companion rather than the awe and adoration of the great world? This was thy folly, ill-fated Cleopatra, and thine, nobler Zenobia; but the child of Derceto proved herself worthy of her divine mother, and Arzemia shall not be less than Semiramis, with no Ninus to divide her empire," were the last words of a reverie overheard by Shirin. And the sultana thought it high time to draw the budding maiden into the open world. Her period of childhood was ended.

"Thou knowest, my lord, that our child's angelic beauty is far exceeded by the brilliancy of her mind; that she has mastered the languages spoken by the great nations, and the wisdom taught by the Magi; but since, obey-

ing thy behest, I cautiously gave her some intimation of her horoscope, I perceive a change in her demeanor which gives me much concern. Seeking the lonely haunts of our gardens, Arzemia acts as though she held communion with spirits, discoursing on the hollowness of love, and dreaming of a superhuman destiny reserved for her by the god-stars. *Ahura-Mazda* has granted us the blessed child to cheer our later years. Our daughter is a harp strung to charm discord and to scatter gloom, not to be untuned by disuse. May the fearful *devas* pass her, who roams in realms too visionary to be safe!" prayed the scheming sultana, sure of her game.

"What wouldst thou have me do, Shirin? Give her in marriage to the man whom Chosroes honors most?" asked the father imperiously, early marriage being compatible with Zarathustra's moral teachings.

"Not now, my lord; let the child see the court, the court see her, before the question of love is broached," suggested the emboldened sultana.

"Sultana, it was my pleasure that exalted

thee above the fairest of my harem, and thy son above his brothers; it is love's triumph, and thy daughter, favored by the god-stars, shall be favored more than ever princess was. Arrayed like *Arustra*, she shall receive her first homage at my side," promised the autocratic sire. And so did Shirin once more triumph over her rivals in royal grace.

Thus drawn into publicity at her mother's initiative, Arzemia dazzled the court with her houri-like graces not less than her imperial bearing. Here it was, however, that the girl's heart received the winged arrow from love's unerring bow, shattering all foregone imaginings as a spire smitten by lightning. It was as though a curtain had risen to reveal a magic scene with one fascination greater than all the others—and he a man whose like could well account for love like Zenobia's, and madness like Cleopatra's. In frame but little above the average, otherwise a figure reminiscent of the war-god whom the Olympians feared; unhandsome, but imposing; complexion olive, nose aquiline, eyes deep, black, flashing but mild; chin hidden by a beard, raven black; heavy

hair and mustache harmonizing with the beard; thick, arched eyebrows; a curling, sensuous lip; shapely feet, shapelier hands; the whole in the attire of a Persian general. Such was Shahrbaraz to whose talents Chosroes was largely indebted for his most valuable conquests. Covered with glory, cumbered with royal favors, flattered by the courtier, idolized by the army, and lionized by the people, the general had hardly anything to wish for when Arzemia's eye met his; then all other ambitions paled before the one, all-devouring passion to kneel in tender worship before her who looked so much more divine than human.

That was Arzemia's day of destiny, and it did not close without an incident which alarmed both king and court. The cause was a sealed document found before the celebrated grand portal of Chosroes Nushirvan's white palace, warning the monarch that a plot was ripe to overthrow him by a sudden blow, and that the bodyguard was implicated in the nefarious conspiracy. Prompt action was urgent, and Chosroes, frightened out of his wits, summoned his bravest general to take tem-

porary charge of his capital and palace. Shahrbaraz pledged himself to continued vigilance until the conspirators should be brought to grief—"Within the walls of Ctesiphon are twelve thousand golden spears; twenty-five thousand more are within the courier's call; let not thy peace be disturbed, oh, my sovereign; Shahrbaraz will not sleep," spoke the resourceful strategist with an inward laugh, and proceeded to arrange matters to suit himself.

Unaware of the cause which stirred the authorities of the court, the people wondered at the feverish activity of the military. Large bodies of troops moved out, larger ones moved into the fortifications of the splendid city, so that with the descent of night every access to the palace was under strong guard, and Ctesiphon presented the aspect of a besieged place, prepared to repel an aggressive enemy. What was going to happen that night?

As to Arzemia, untouched by this wave of commotion, she abandoned herself to an overmastering passion, burning to the core of her fiery nature; and, succumbing to the fever of her soul, she fled the confinement of her sump-

tuous bed-chambers to seek the cooling breeze in the garden, a separate enclosure within the royal park. It was night, and the darkness was hardly broken by the thin crescent of the new moon, when the princess nimbly picked her way to a sequestered nook on a terrace whence in daylight an extensive view of the pleasure-ground was afforded. Here in a recess was an arbor furnished exquisitely, and here, in the posture of supplication, the maiden invoked the help of Zarathustra's revealed Power—*Ahura-Mazda.*

"Thou, eternal *Ahura-Mazda*, the god of gods, the creator of light, who furtherest throughout all space the good and the true, the holy and the beautiful,—and ye bright ministers, who yearn to do his bidding,—if what I feel as fire burning in my heart is love by heaven kindled, then let no barrier stand between the one for whom I burn and me,—yea, no longer than the time required for two wind-lashed flames to rush together and melt in one celestial blaze. Messengers of *Ahura-Mazda*, my message carry to him whom fate has named my lord; bend ye walls, be deaf

ye watchmen, that he who loves Arzemia fly hither unhindered!"

There had been a mysterious gleam on the lower balconies of the palace; it flared up, vanished, reappeared again, and once more; and then nothing was seen or heard save at the postern of the garden, where the signal must have been looked for and understood. Swift as a hind there sped from the mazes of the darkened palace a human figure athwart the semi-tropic thickets of the grounds, admitted another one through the rear-gate, whispered a few syllables, and returned to the white pile of a thousand apartments hushed in perfect silence. The intruder, obviously informed of the whereabouts of his object, glided like a ghost toward Arzemia's retreat, and stood enchanted by the voice which articulated the essence of his highest felicity. Hardly did the last word die on her lip when the problematic person sank on his knees and, inclining his head as in adoration, spoke in a tone thrilling with passion, "Divine child, whom *Ahura-Mazda* graces with the light of his countenance, grant me the privilege

to worship at thy feet, an humble supplicant, my heart being thine, my soul thine—forever thine."

The frightened maiden would have screamed for help had not the voice she heard recalled a succession of notes that were still ringing in her ears. In a second she realized what she trembled to believe possible.

"And who art thou, most daring of men, who fearest not to invade the inviolable privacy of Chosroes Nushirvan's daughter?" cried the maiden in fluttering apprehension, dreading the realization of her prayer.

"Forgive! I am not what I was before thine eye smote me with madness to be thy votary—thy slave,—or not to be at all," was the answer.

"*Ahura-Mazda!* thou the man whom Iran honors—thou, Shahrbaraz?" cried the girl.

"Thy servitor, thy slave in eternity," was the appealing reiteration.

"The auspicious god-stars brought thee hither. Oh! but humble not Arzemia in thus humbling thyself; the god-stars have linked our fates and, come what may, I am thine,

yea, and thou art mine in eternity!" exclaimed the enraptured maiden.

"My heaven!" was the laconic ejaculation of the great soldier who, leaping to his feet, embraced her rapturously, pressing her to his heart.

As if in hymeneal sympathy with love's delicious union, the bulbul poured forth a stream of soul-stirring song, the sweet cadence calling forth responsive notes from the thick of sylvan recesses. Tears flowed from the eyes of Arzemia and fell on the face of her lover, who raised her like an infant in his mighty arms, covering her cheeks with passionate kisses.

"Thy tears of bliss will make the angels weep in paradise, sweet goddess," whispered Persia's world-renowed hero.

"The bulbul!—I never heard the bulbul sing so sad, so sweet, so prophetic; ah! it seems to sigh and weep and speak to my heart of things words cannot express! Some spirit moves it to move our hearts," breathed Arzemia with emotion.

"Thou art creation's sympathetic harp, re-

sponsive to spiritual harmonies lower natures fail to realize; the bird's melody is to me an unmeaning song, but in thy voice I hear *Mazda's* music which moves the heavenly spheres," said Shahrbaraz softly,

"It is bliss to receive tribute from the lip of love; but what a thing am I, compared with thee, Iran's pride, who smote the Roman and took his holy city! Who has done a greater deed? If the armies of Chosroes were thine, wouldst thou not conquer the world?"

"I have conquered earth and heaven, star of my felicity; thou being mine, what remains in all the worlds to wish for? To smite the Roman and take his holy city was less an achievement than to come near to thee, the pearl of beauty, reached at greater hazard than he faces who dives into the ocean's abyss in quest of treasure," affirmed the general.

"Alas, thou art right! O, gods!—Thy life, thy dear life—shouldst thou be found at this hour with me at this place! Dearest, what power enabled thee to pass the guards, whose heads would answer for thy presence where the king alone has right?—Go hence, O, my

soul's adorer, my heart's adored, go hence, lest the *devas* thwart our happiness! I hear the friendly spirits whisper—depart," urged Arzemia, awaking to the danger that beset her lover under the circumstances.

"Thy prayer, child of light, that bade the walls to bend and the watchmen to be deaf,—yea, and love, whom Orpheus followed to the world of shades, have leveled my pathway hither, fearless of fate. They who enter heaven laugh death to scorn. Thy presence renders me invulnerable to mortal steel. Ah! waste no second, cherub, in the thought of death or danger," cried Shahrbaraz ardently.

"Forbid it, *Ahura-Mazda*, that Iran's glory be smitten by a treacherous hand!—Yet play not with the envious fates, lest they grow jealous of Arzemia's bliss, who would no heaven take for what is here on earth," cried the girl appealingly.

"Let all thy cares henceforth be mine, divine Arzemia. My 'golden spears' hold every fort and gate, and have no will but that of thy Shahrbaraz, who could be king this hour were he inclined. To come near thee I

had to act my part unfair or fair; love knows no scruples. A scheme devised by me and taken seriously by the king gave me control of Ctesiphon and court," explained the strategist.

"The god-stars rule that I be queen one day and thou my king; my Ninus thou, I thy Semiramis, with Rome and Iran prostrate at our feet!—Ah, there a light!" exclaimed the girl in alarm, her eyes having caught a glimmer in the palace.

"It is the signal for me to begone," said Shahrbaraz, and a moment later the postern closed behind him, having given and received the kiss that is a taste of Elysian rapture.

The clandestine intercourse between the greatest general and the fairest princess of Iran was thus carried on for a time, when revolutionary changes threw Ctesiphon into confusion. Chosroes Nushirvan's court was a hotbed of intrigue, and his harem a seething caldron, overflowing with all the vices and evils engendered by arbitrary rule. Among the host of jealous females under the roof of the palace, Shirin, the Christian sultana, had the upper hand, having charmed her lord to

the extent of disinheriting and imprisoning Kavadh, the legitimate heir to the throne, in favor of her son Mardanshah. But a turn of the wheel gave Kavadh the reins of government, and his first act was to drag his wretched father into his vaults of uncounted treasures, and let him perish there of hunger. Seventeen brothers were next executed to insure the rule of the monstrous parricide. These fearful crimes were inspired less by vengeance than—who would have dreamed it?—by Kavadh's vehement passion for Shirin. But the distracted sultana recoiled with loathing from the murderer of her husband and her son, and when the miscreant resorted to force he held a bleeding corpse in his arms, the sultana having ended her life by a self-inflicted wound. Arzemia was her only surviving child, and Shahrbaraz knew how to provide for the safety of his worshipped princess. Shortly after Kavadh fell.

During the chaotic conditions which followed the fall of Kavadh, Shahrbaraz matured a plot for the usurpation of Iran's sovereignty. Sustained by his fifty thousand golden spears,

and favored by Arzemia's friends, the dashing general entered Ctesiphon in triumph, and had himself crowned in the palace of the voluptuous Chosroes. When it transpired that Arzemia not alone favored the usurper, but was going to be wedded to him in the imperial fire-temple, her many suitors combined in organizing a conspiracy, headed by Faruch-Zad, the mighty satrap of Khorassan, who was desperately in love with the princess. Shahrbaraz was assassinated on the day set for his wedding, his body was mutilated and dragged by an ass through the streets of Ctesiphon. Arzemia's horror was scarcely exceeded by her sorrow and her vengeance; and her opportunity was not slow in coming, being called to the succession of her father's throne, when Faruch-Zad urged his suit with obtrusive audacity. Policy forced her to smile on the man she hated, while her armies were engaged in the fateful struggle against the now all-conquering hordes of overflowing Islam. Impatient of delay and tortured by uncertainty, the satrap of Khorassan resolved to take by force what was denied him by

favor. But the queen's friends learned of the plot; Faruch-Zad's followers were overpowered at the portal of the palace, and he was arraigned as a traitor before the one whose hatred for him could hardly be surpassed by his love for her. Arzemia blessed the gods for the chance thus afforded her to avenge the murder of Shahrbaraz. She apostrophized the culprit with bitter contumely, and had him executed under most cruel circumstances.

Faruch-Zad was not dead an hour when tidings from the battle-field spread consternation in the court. The golden lances, long held to be invincible, sustained a crushing defeat at the hands of Islam's votaries, and among the slain was Mahmud, the intelligent elephant, who bled to death through a wound struck at the extremity of his trunk. Mahmud's fall was generally accepted as prophetic of worse things to follow, and Arzemia, seeing her empire crumbling, turned to the Magi for an ungarbled version of her horoscope which was kept for reference in the royal archives. With fatalistic resignation the youthful queen listened to the dark prophecies associated with her birth,

and insisted on having her father's dream read to her, it having been kept on record with the documents of her nativity. Deeply impressed by the fearful purport of her sire's vision on the night of her coming into this world, and remembering its ghastly realization in subsequent developments, Arzemia exclaimed resignedly, "It is *Ahura-Mazda's* immutable decree that Iran's ancient glories fade with me at whose birth the god-stars frowned. Were it not better for Arzemia not to have been born?"

The queen had hardly uttered these words when an ominous noise in the royal court-yard caused her armed guard to rush toward the entrance of the palace. Here they were met by a desperate band of conspirators led by a relative of Faruch-Zad. The encounter was short and decisive. Arzemia fell into the hands of the avenger of the dead satrap, was tortured with refined cruelty, and put to death ignominiously.

Thus perished the noblest and most virtuous sovereign lady of one of the greatest empires which succumbed to the sword of Islam.

THE
STUDENT OF TIMBUCTU.

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AT the close of the year 1578 the slave-markets of Mauritania were glutted to their uttermost, and for once the price of a male slave was less than that of a donkey. This overstock of human ware was due to the thousands of prisoners who had survived the fateful battle fought in the neighborhood of Al-Kesar Kebir, on the banks of the Elmahassen, between the invading army of Dom Sebastian, the youthful, overbearing monarch of Lusitania, and the host of Muley Abd-al-Melek, the formidable Emir-al-Mumemin, the Commander of the true believers, the *Seedna* or lord of the Moorish Empire.*

* This battle and the fate of Dom Sebastian as narrated in this tradition agrees with historical fact.

The Moslem's cruelty to his Christian slaves rose in proportion to the latter's decline as marketable articles, and fanaticism revelled in the daily spectacle of crusaders doomed to immurement, because of their refusing to embrace Islam by uttering the *Fatha*. The irony of the historic whirligig showed itself in the fact that the Catholic Auto-da-fè had its counterpart in the frightful doom of a king and an army led by the flower of his nobility, who, barely a hundred miles from the coast of their kingdom, had to choose between apostasy or being immured alive for the edification of the vengeful Moor. The wretches were compelled to prepare their own graves, usually cells in the city's wall, one Christian bricking up his fellow only to be in turn entombed alive himself.

A melancholy distinction was reserved for the royal zealot, Dom Sebastian, who had encountered crushing defeat and humiliation. With less than half of his smitten chivalry and valiant soldiers he saw himself in the power of an inexorable foe, himself wounded and in chains pining in the vile dungeon of Mequinez,

one of the Sultan's capitals, the others being Fez and Morocco. After the obsequies of the unmourned *Seedna*, who had died on the field of battle, his son and successor, having been proclaimed Sultan, and crowned in the holy shrine of Mulai Edris at Fez, proposed to celebrate his coronation by the entombment alive of the Christian king who had invaded his father's empire, notwithstanding the warning of the late *Shereef* that the unjust inroad would surely land the aggressors in ruin. His Majesty furthermore remembered the treacherous proceeding of Sebastian, who, at the end of the decisive battle, had caused a white flag to be displayed, but had broken the truce by throwing himself with fifty of his knights into the thick of the Moorish ranks, causing slaughter and consternation, and resulting in the death of the late Sultan.

But the strongest motive of the young *Shereef's* dire vengeance was the unaccountable loss of his sire's priceless crown, which Muley Abd-al-Melek was in the habit of carrying with him whithersoever he went, wearing it on solemn occasions. Muley had worn

the crown upon his head while the great battle was being fought, after which that invaluable symbol of imperial grandeur was not to be found. The crown was an heirloom traced back to the great Caliphat of Omar, whose victorious general Saad had acquired it with the enormous treasures of the Chosroes. It was worn by Chosroes Nushirvan in the throne-hall of his grand palace in Madayn, the capital of ancient Persia, and its incalculable value had been further enhanced by a rare jewel which the Emperor Heraclius had sent Omar as a present.

Such were the cumulative incentives to one of the most cruel executions devised by human atrocity. And the tortures also inflicted by order of the new *Seedna* on his most loyal attendants, such as the *Mul-el-Ma*, who satisfies His Majesty's thirst when in camp from a gazelle-skin; the *Mul Attai*, who prepares the royal tea and serves it; and the most important *Mul M'dul*, the keeper and holder of the *Shereef's* red umbrella, left the mystery unsolved.

The inhabitants of Mequinez, who since times immemorial furnished the bulk of the

Emperor's most devoted servitors, tingled with excitement, and the entire population turned out to witness the burial of a live Christian monarch. From the portal of the imperial mosque issued a train of chosen notables, long-bearded *Kadis* robed in white flowing raiments, wearing white turbans, red sandals, the *delill* or prayer book suspended from the belt by a cord of silk; *talebs*, the doctors of law; *emins*, the ministers of the mosque; *adools*, the public notaries; and a train of *fukies*, the all-moving luminaries at whose feet the rising generation of the faithful drink in truth and wisdom. They were joined at the city's gate by another cortege, grotesque and dismal enough to match the gruesome processions of the Inquisition. This was made up of happy juveniles, who struck tom-toms, rent the air with the blare of infernal horns, and accompanied the music with ludicrous grimaces and comical dances, to the great delight of a sympathetic crowd, who swelled the chorus to the pitch of mad vociferation. A hideous negro, broad-shouldered, tall and massive, his frame clothed tightly in black, his eyes blinking dis-

mally from circles of red, with a pointed hat to add several feet to his unusual height, impersonated Azrael the angel of death. Behind this caricature came a donkey whereon was seated the woeful representative of outraged Christian royalty, bare-headed, dressed in a black *jellab*, holding in his right hand a human skull, —a picture of terror and anguish. This was Dom Sebastian, riding to his sepulchre, on his right Monkir, to his left Nakir,—the demons of livid hue, who wake the dead to question him about his faith, and beat him with clubs if unable to stand the examination. The rear of this group was occupied by Eblis, grotesquely attired in red and armed with the implements of hellish torture. A throng of naked, filthy saints ran along howling and spitting at the whilom majesty of Portugal, relegating his soul to the deepest pit, and praying Allah to show no mercy to the Christian dog. Having passed out of the city's gate, the procession advanced along a tortuous road, winding among well-fostered gardens, protected by an outer and much lower wall, toward the spot where a cell about six feet

high, but barely wide enough to enclose a human body, stood open in the main wall for the death by suffocation and for the dreamless rest of the fallen king. Too weak to dismount unassisted, Sebastian was rudely handled by Monkir and Nakir, who raised him from his seat, lifted him to the level of the cell, and pushed him inside, turning him with a twist so that the fanatic spectators had a full view of his face. Three wooden bars held the victim against the dead wall.

All eyes were now turned in the direction of the mosque, whence the signal for the closing up of the king's grave was to be given by the firing of a gun and the hoisting of a flag. The ghastly ceremony was so timed that the bricking up of the living tomb coincided with the hour of prayer, so that the boom of cannon and the appearance of the flag streaming to the breeze, was answered by a score of muezzins from the tops of their minarets, who called; "*Allah akbar, Allah akbar*,—God is great, and Mohammed is his Prophet!" The multitude fell prostrate in the dust, sending the *fatha* eastward to Mecca: "Praise be to

God, the Lord of all creatures, the most merciful, the King of the Day of Judgment! Thee do we worship, and of Thee do we beg assistance. Direct us in the right way, in the way of those to whom Thou hast been gracious, not of those against whom thou art incensed, nor of those who go astray."

The echoes of the *Sulhama* having expired in the air, the faithful rose from their posture of adoration, and the supreme Kadi of the land read this decree: "Hear me, ye worshippers of the true God! The Christian there had planned the downfall of our nation and the uprooting of Islam; but Allah willed it otherwise, decreeing that we deal with him as he meant to deal with us. Our late Seedna—may Allah grant him the joys of paradise—died in his coat of mail, combating that infidel dog, who came as a foe and acted as a traitor, dishonoring his flag. Therefore did our Emir-al-Mumemin decree that he perish ignominiously, like the other slaves who would not recite the *fatha*. May Allah wither the right hand of our Seedna's enemies.—There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his Prophet!"—Slowly

bricks and mortar closed up the open side of the upright tomb. One hour later there was no cell to be seen, but a plain wall hiding a monarch quickly choking to death, while the barbarians returned jubilant to the city.

Under the rule of Muley Zidan, a firman, bearing the Grand Vizier's signature, was placarded in every mosque of his domain, promising him who should be instrumental in restoring the lost crown to the ruling dynasty not alone high honors, but the option of leading home as wife any maiden of the empire, from the daughter of the first Sultana down to any damsel within the confines of Mauritania, and the assurance was given that there would be no inquiry as to how the lucky finder had come into possession of the imperial diadem.

As time lent distance to the disastrous crusade and its tragic sequels, a spontaneous crop of tales and legends transferred the former memorable event into the realm of romance. Down to this day the rustic folk of Lusitania look forward to the return of Dom Sebastian, whom they believe to dwell among the Moors

in the somnolent state of Barbarossa, while among the tribes of Western Barbary it is popularly current that, owing to unknown causes, the great battle is periodically fought over, always at new moon, the phantom armies engaging each other on the banks of the El-mahassen, and the combat winding up with the historic rout of the crusaders.

Indeed the foolhardy invasion would read like the myth of the Argonauts, had the outcome turned out less crushing to the adventurers. For a youthful king, in the twenties, and of limited resources, to embark on a career of conquest remote from his base of supply, the coveted prize being a warlike empire much larger than the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal combined, an empire which Christendom learned to fear, is so daring an adventure that, but for its unquestioned reality, it could pass as a bit of chivalrous fiction. And the circumstances under which the last encounter took place, the death of the Sultan, the loss of the crown, and the terrible fate of the prisoners, tend much to invest the event with a halo of the mystic and the ghostly.

However, the legendary evolution of that desperate struggle near Al-Kesar Kebir may be traced back to the adventures of a student from Timbuctu, who arrived at Fez at the beginning of the sixteenth century. That was the time when the Fazzi had good cause to boast of cherishing one of the greatest centres of learning in the world. From the valley of the Nile, from the banks of the Congo and the Niger, from populous Europe, darkest Africa, and farthest Asia, the youth of the opulent without distinction of creed and race flocked to the halls of the Kairouin to cull the honey dropping from the lips of inspiration, especially the dimly revealed arcana that teach how to read the signs of the stars.

The Kairouin was then, and is in diminished lustre now, four institutions in one,—the highest school, the largest mosque, the greatest library, and the most hospitable caravansary in the vast regions traversed by the Atlas Mountains. Within the precincts of the Kairouin hundreds of poor students found then not only free shelter and tuition but also food and garments, the cost being defrayed from

the ample bequest of the philanthropic Fatma, the original benefactress of that curious university. It embraced a miniature world of the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the faithful and the infidel, the good and the bad; was the home of every Moslem who had none other; and, among its many good things, was distinguished for an atmosphere of tolerance, peace and cordiality. Even to-day the president of the Kairouin, the *Mokaddun*, whose office is hereditary, treats all as equals, the prince and the beggar having the same right, and that is to take life easy,—very easy. Instances of nervousness from overwork have never been heard of in the Kairouin. Once matriculated, the student is not expected to pass examinations, and is a privileged character, his presence in the city being a source of revenue to its inhabitants. For it should be remembered that among those who come to the Kairouin in quest of wisdom are the sons of the wealthiest *sheykhs*, nobles, and merchants from all the habitable lands which skirt the sands of the Sahara, young lords wrapped in soft silks, bestriding Arabian

steeds magnificently caparisoned, followed by retinues of slaves to cater to their physical wants, and harems to beguile their ennui. Nor is, in the chase of romantic diversion, the beautiful Fazzi neglected; the people being inclined to connive at the trivial transgressions of the future pillars of Moslem scholarship. Thrifty parents know how and when to be absent when the young lords from Insala, Nubia, Tunis, Tripoli, Egypt, Taradunt, or Timbuctu are sure to mark their transit through apartments of supposed inviolable privacy by a trail of gold-sand. Such are the traditions of the Kairouin, realized down to this day.

But the student of Timbuctu with whom this tale is concerned was in every way an exception. He disdained luxury, spurned the delights of the harem, consorted with nobody, had but one aged slave to wait on him, dwelt in a tent on a rock in the outskirts of the city, and spent his days among the piles of old books and manuscripts treasured on the shelves of the Kairouin's subterranean library. In the bazaars he was known for years as the student who paid for his purchases in silver or

in gold, without ever waiting for the change. He was not handsome. His most remarkable feature was a face strikingly reminding one of the owl's, with orange eyeballs which glowed like living topaz stones. He wore an expression which, once caught, haunted one like an apparition. His white-haired attendant was dumb and moved like an automaton of bronze, leaving one in doubt as to whether he was really a creature of flesh and blood. All that was known about that strange student was that he had come with the great caravan from Timbuctu, that his name was Omeyya, and that he devoted his whole time to researches in works of the occult sciences, such, for instance, as alchemy and astrology, supplementing his inquiries with practical experiments, assisted by his automatic attendant. His was a personality whom the Fazzi liked much less than they feared. Omeyya was left severely alone, but this was just the condition which seemed to suit him. His unique appearance and singular individuality had their origin in his exceptionally romantic birth, and in a career even stranger than his beginning. He

grew up as the adopted child of the renowned sibyl Kadijah, whose abode was a cavern near Timbuctu, and who was more shunned than sought by the people of her quarter. To the simple folk Kadijah was known as the "owl-witch,"—rarely met, and then usually during the dusky hour before and after sunset, still more rarely at night; ever in a hurry, with her hair-covered arms flapping like the wings of a scared ostrich. She was in very truth like a hairy owl; weazen-faced, the extremities of her body resembling claws while her face bore every resemblance to that of the owl, orange eyeballs and a nose so pointed, hooked, and beak-like that it partly covered the thin curl of her upper lip. Only in extreme cases of distress did the people of Timbuctu resort to her for help, and her manner of meeting emergencies inspired them with awe. Her most potent specific was the likeness of a long-necked, heron-like bird, crudely drawn with charcoal on a bit of leather, and hung on the breast of the afflicted patient. The cure was assured.

In Kadijah's sombre abode Omeyya came

to his consciousness of life, nursed with motherly solicitude, and was later initiated into the secrets of her dark arts. One day, the boy having risen to mature youth, the owl-witch startled him by offering to inform him as to the mystery of his life.

"Thou knowest not who thou art, my son, and my approaching end requires me to let nothing stand between thee and the truth concerning thy legitimate parents. In this place Naïma, the daughter of Moadh, then recognized the strongest arm of Timbuctu, gave thee birth. Thy father's name was Abu Sofian, the heir of Abu Thaleb, whom Moadh had slain in a family feud. When of age, and strong enough to avenge his father's death, Sofian burned to run a steel through Moadh's heart, vengeance being his only thought and prayer. From the flat roof of his mother's home Sofian had a clear view of his foe's terraced habitation, and thither he daily sent his imprecations, determined to break into it at the first opportunity, and make an end of the fierce homicide. The outbreak of a fire in the immediate neighborhood of Moadh's house

gave the daring youth his chance. Armed with a deadly weapon, he succeeded in slipping unnoticed into the *Saalemlik* (reception room) of the hated man. Missing his object here, the son of Abu Thaleb made a dash for the *Haremlik*, resolved to strike down the head of the house in the inviolable seclusion of his wives. His rush was checked by the appearance of a tiny, jewelled, alabaster hand, that swept a silken curtain aside,—and there stood revealed above the frame of a screen a Houri of charms so enchanting that the lad was not sure that he was awake. 'Comest thou to save me from the flames? They are out to watch the fire, and my sire commanded me to await his return; he is a fearful man to be disobeyed,' spoke the girl in excitement; but her voice melted Sofian's heart, and made his eyes to swim.

"'Fairy of the sun, disguise thy beauty in a man's *jellab* and turban that I may save thee, even if I die in the attempt,' replied Sofian with great presence of mind; and the girlish figure disappeared, to return as that of a stately youth.

"'My name is Naïma, and if thou wilt be the light of mine eyes and the breath of my life, I will be the dust for thy feet to tread upon,' said the metamorphosed maiden, and, favored by the general confusion, they gained the street unobserved. Under Sofian's roof the same day Naïma became his wife; but Timbuctu was too small for Moadh's rage, grief and shame, and the young lovers guarded their secret so well that many weeks passed by before the city was in a furor at the news of the elopement.

"Moadh summoned his kindred to assist him in avenging the outrage; but Sofian was not to be found napping. An armed force of his kith and kin guarded his house day and night against an attack by surprise, while his girl-wife was delivered to my keeping in case of defeat. There was a siege and an assault, and, in the hand to hand struggle that ensued, Moadh met his death at the hand of Sofian, who was in turn mortally stabbed by one of the avengers. The youthful widow remained in my charge, and here thou wast born, thy mother having had nobody to return to or ap-

peal to for protection. Sorrow, shame and remorse caused her to shun the sight of man, so that she would never venture out in daytime, lest someone recognize her and do her harm; for she was hated of all her relatives.

"She did not remain long in my keeping. In an evil hour she left her safe refuge to bask in the morning sun, only to fall an easy prey to the rapacity of marauding Bedouins who, having attacked and plundered the city, lighted on her as they passed this way. My arts could not rescue her, Omeyya, and the daughter of Moadh has changed hands many times since,—a slave or a mistress, just as it suits her master's fancy. This happened nineteen years ago, when thou hadst become my charge, yea, and my comfort.

"In my youth I was loved by a man of the black arts, and of him I inherited the secret of Egypt's great mystery, the land of his birth. He knew much, but not enough to escape death, the inexorable reaper, whose approach I also now feel. To-morrow I shall be no more, and this hollow shall be my sepulchre. Bury me as a son would his mother.—Under

that stone thou wilt find gold to sustain thee for the length of thy days. Yet shalt thou depart hence to seek a brighter life, greater wealth, higher station, and the happiness of love,—yea, and thy mother,—in the famous city on the River of Pearls, provided thou wilt act as thou art bidden. This unlighted hole, Omeyya, hides Egypt's great mystery, which is hereafter to be in thy trust.—Take this rod from my hand and describe in mid-air the sign of the crescent from right to left toward the eastern wall," commanded the witch.

Omeyya did as he was bidden. In answer the silvery crescent loomed up on the bleak rock, with its horns gradually lengthening downward until it completed the shape of an oval door opening to an arched space, brilliant with dazzling light. In the heart of the vault thus revealed there stood, perched on a block of onyx, a large heron, white as snow from its crop down, the rest of the plumage sky-blue traversed by lines of hieroglyphics in relief set in jewels of every hue with a predominance of the ruby and the amethyst. The scintillant hieroglyphics were irregularly scat-

tered over the body of the mystic bird, thicker along the wings and thickest around the breast and the gracefully elongated neck; the eyes in the beautiful head were of topaz, and the long bill of burnished gold, pointed with black diamonds. Of a deep lapis-lazuli color was the heron's tail, spreading to the dimensions of the peacock's and furnishing a field for star-like configurations set in sparkling pearls, emeralds, sapphires, beryls, chrysolites, carbuncles, sards, and a variety of the jasper and the licure, while the black of his legs was likewise relieved by kabbalistic lines in rare gems.

"By the genii of Amenti, the masters who fashioned thee in the beginning to be the symbol and oracle of Osiris, O, Phœnix! I adjure thee to accept this youth in my stead as thy favorite, and to answer his call as soon as he shall decipher the emblems that move the spirits of thy mystery," screamed the sibyl, vociferously.

Omeyya's eyes dilated in amazement. The bird's inanimate form gave signs of life. Ruffling his great plumes, he displayed a blaze of

variegated gems, flashing like so many brilliant stars. From his feather train issued a haze of golden orange, changed into a flame of carmine, which consumed the bird and left the place to its previous dinginess.

"Mark me well, for death is upon me!—The rod in thy hand holds the key to the mystery thou art to unriddle in Fatma's great school, during a period of strict abstinence from carnal pleasures. For thirty-seven months thou shalt drink the dew of the morning, shalt bathe at new moon in the River of Pearls, sleep within canvas-walls, so that thy nature be untainted and thou worthy of the power the revealed arcana insure for thee," exclaimed the sibyl, never to speak again. With the last word her shrivelled frame fell lifeless to the ground.

Omeyya suspected that the rod contained something to be studied. On examining it in full light he found the upper end, looking like a carved handle, to be a closing stopple removable by a turn. From the hollow of the rod he pulled forth a rolled up papyrus. The unrolling of the document proved it to be much

larger than it at first appeared, and Omeyya looked with concentrated attention at the life-like picture of the phœnix it represented, the shining hieroglyphics being startlingly reproduced. Having reverently buried his foster-mother and possessed himself of the hoard, Omeyya abandoned the gloomy abode of his boyhood, earnestly resolved to comply most scrupulously with the directions of the sibyl.

When we meet Omeyya at the Kairouin of Fez he is at the close of his probationary period, and we need not be surprised to see him one new moon's eve on the bank of Elmahassen, rod in hand, ready to test the occult science acquired during years of assiduous application.

It is a cloudy night, and Omeyya strains his eyes to catch a glimpse of the tiny crescent. "Spirit of Kadijah, assist me," prayed Omeyya, and his rod described an imaginary crescent in face of the real one, now gleaming through a fleecy cloud. Like the flash of a search-light, there broke forth a radiance in the crown of a cedar-tree, focussing upon a nest upon which sat the shining phœnix.

"Bird of Osiris,—worship of Heliopolis! if I am as worthy of thy masters' favor as I have been successful in fathoming the mystic lore which commands thy presence, then let me see the encounter of those armies which years and years ago fought their last battle in this valley, so that I may learn what has become of Abd-al-Melek's crown," spoke the student of Timbuctu, circumscribing the area by a sweep of his rod.

A prolonged scream was the bird's response, and its thousandfold echo a rumbling and stamping, a tramping and clattering, like that of heavy cavalry and artillery, followed by muffled hurrahs, and the neighing of horses. In the hazy twilight of the new-born moon Omeyya surveyed from a convenient elevation the inrushing of column after column, on horse, on foot, accompanied by trains of ammunition. It was a foreign army in the act of occupying strategic points. Wild cheers rent the air at the sight of a royal train that emerged from the distance, a youthful king at the head of a compact force of mounted cavaliers armed to the teeth. No sooner had the

kingly commander surveyed the ground than he ordered a bridge of boats to be thrown across the river. The bulk of the army formed into two divisions, one fortifying the position occupied while the other hurried across the water to do likewise on the other side. It was a scene of feverish activity.

During the precipitous preparations in this part of the valley, a Moslem host burst forth from the shades of the groves, gardens and thickets up and down the stream, bore up with the speed of the wind, deployed into frowning lines of battle—having caused a force of horsemen to ford the stream—and faced the foe on both sides of the water. Surrounded by a formidable body-guard, appeared the Commander of the true faithful, whose pavilion was pitched at the foot of the hill on which Omeyya stood, in the midst of the minor pavilions of His Majesty's ministers. The soul of Moslem inspiration was the Shereef Abd-al-Melek, mounted on a white horse, his crown showing him to be the imperial centre of force. At a motion of his hand the Court's Emin gave the signal for

battle by the cry: "*La illaha il Allah!*" But before the echoes answered the call, a dashing body of Portuguese cavalry broke into the advance lines of the Moors, and the fierce onslaught was backed up by a discharge of artillery, which mowed down great numbers of the true believers.

"Hamdillah!—Destroy the enemy of the faithful!" thundered the Sultan, and the rush of his host was like the roar of the forest swept by the storm. Outnumbered three to one, Dom Sebastian's lines were broken into upon every side. Yet the brave Christians not only held their ground, but threw their entire phalanx of foot soldiery against the enemy's left wing with such an impetus as drove it back toward the royal pavilion, spreading consternation and confusion. Abd-al-Melek, who had watched the action with intense concern, on seeing his forces hurled backward raved like a madman, smote with his scimitar whoever came within its reach, cursed his men, and wound up by tearing the crown from his head and flinging it into the tide of the river. For a moment the issue was doubtful, but the

Christians fell as grass struck by the sycthe. Presently a white flag was raised in Sebastian's quarter, which induced the Moors to slacken their fury, when the desperate king dashed against their ranks with as many of his knights as were yet alive. The enraged Moslems made short work of the king's devoted band, slaughtered as traitors, and the victory was proclaimed by the Emin from a pile built of Christian heads. From this unique minaret the *Sulhama* stirred the echoes of the valley: "*Allah akbar! Allah akbar!*" Prostrate on their faces the host offered up prayer; all except the *Shereef*, whose head sank until the chin touched his breast, and when assistance came it was too late. Abd-al-Melek was dead; and dead night ruled, the phantom hosts dissolving as they had come. Omeyya's heart throbbed in hope and suspense. What will day reveal to him in the river's tide?

Early dawn found the student on the spot he had held during the eventful night. "*Bismillah! Arrahmani! Arrahimi!*" exclaimed Omeyya, blessing the "all-merciful God" for his wonderful success. For in the slime of

the bed, about four feet under the surface of the eddying current, his eye distinctly discerned the precious object. In a moment Omeyya plunged into the water and emerged therefrom with the tiara of Abd-al-Melek. The achievement was dazzling enough to turn a young head, but Omeyya had passed through a probation which left him in full control of his passions.

Although successful beyond his most sanguine expectations, Omeyya returned to Fez in a mood of profound sadness, having nobody on earth to share with him the golden anticipations inseparable from the treasure in his trust, and the incalculable possibilities latent in the potency of his magic rod. Though sobered by the earnest researches of years, Omeyya's thoughts involuntarily reverted to the prize to which his find entitled him. He had a claim on the *Seedna's* own daughter, but it behooved him to ascertain whether the first maiden of the empire was a covetable acquisition; secondly, whether, considering the *Shereef's* chronic inclination to silence annoying pretenders by putting them out of the

way, it were prudent to proceed without adequate safeguards.

Full of golden reveries, the youthful wizard drifted the following day into the enclosed bazaar where the Fazzi, after the yearly arrival of the *Akabah*, or the great caravan from Timbuctu, gathered to take a look at the exhibited wares of fair human flesh. It was the slave-dealer's paradise. The square market-place had but one gate and embraced many concerns within its confines, but the chief business was the disposition of slaves by auction or by private bargain. Under a roof of rough boards supported by rude posts, men, women and children were being stripped of their clothing and examined like cattle,—teeth, eyes, mouth, nostrils, chest, arms and legs. The agility of the slaves was tested by a free application of the whip, making them jump high, and their strength by the lifting of heavy weights. Handsome females were treated with more consideration. Bids were made, accepted, or declined. The most of the human chattels were black, and dressed to set off their forms to advantage.

Among the few whites there was a woman for whom the owner asked a fabulous price, and scornfully rejected a bid of twenty-five doubloons, although that was the highest amount that had ever been offered for a slave above thirty years of age. She was not on open exhibition like the others who shared her fate, but screened by a canvas stretched before her in a corner, behind which the prospective purchaser was allowed to make his examination. The one who had last availed himself of this privilege and had just come out from behind the partition, was a negroid Moslem, whose green caftan of silk bespoke his descent from the Prophet, while the soft rich folds of his satin shawl gracefully wound around his upper frame, like his capacious girth, suggested the enjoyment of an ample revenue, with little work and less worry. He was likewise a student at the Kairouin, but his researches were entirely confined to the mystery centred in woman, and the bags of gold-sand he had brought along from Tafilet enabled him to pursue his ardent work with much assiduity.

"What is the age of thy gazelle?" inquired the lineal descendant of Mohammed.

"It is a gazelle from Jannet al Ferdaws, who are ever young and sweet, like the blossoms of the Tuba-tree," replied the slave-dealer volubly.

"If she were a virgin thy comparison would pass, but she has been somebody's love, and must have seen at least thirty Ramazans," observed the holy connoisseur of the fair sex.

"She will see thirty more years and yet be more beautiful than one of twenty. She is worth her weight in gold," asserted the slave-dealer.

"Will a pound of gold-sand buy her?" asked the scion of the Prophet.

"One hundred doubloons will take Naïma," cried the master of the slave.

"Naïma!" echoed a voice nearby. "Naïma —is that thy slave's name?" asked Omeyya eagerly, who had been a witness of the progressing transaction.

"That is her name, Cid, as sweet as herself," returned the cunning dealer.

"I will pay the price if thou canst satisfy

me as to her place of birth, her pedigree, and her antecedents," promised Omeyya without hesitation.

"What thou askest of me I cannot do. We buy and exchange slaves as we trade in other things, never bothering our heads as to whence they come, or who they are. What matters it? I traded for Naïma in Tenduf; she might have come thither from Timbuctu by Tandeng, an oasis in the desert, rich in salt, and fertilized by wholesome springs," said the merchant hypothetically.

"She is mine; let the *taleb* write out the legal transfer," said Omeyya, without so much as a look at the object of his purchase. A murmur of surprise passed around among the onlookers. The saint of the green caftan departed in disgust. In a few minutes the document was produced and signed, the price paid, and Omeyya, trembling all over, led off the slave, whom he felt must be his mother. Brought to his tent, he caused her to remove her *kaik* or face cover, made her sit on a pillow, threw himself on his knees before her, looked into her beautiful countenance, then

kissed her hands and spoke: "Let thy first answer to my first question be plain and brief. —If thy father's name was Moadh of Timbuctu; if thy husband was Sofian the son of Abu Thaleb of the same city; if thy friend was the owl-witch Kadijah; if a child was born to thee in her cave and his name was Omeyya, —then speak the word that I may praise Allah's great mercy."

"What spirit imparted to thee the tale of my woe, master?" cried the woman, in a thrilling tone; "thou must be a descendant of the all-knowing Prophet!"

"No! Is it not enough that I am thy child?" answered Omeyya, with an outburst of tears; and there was a pathetic moment beyond the reach of words.

It is again new-moon. Naïma is mistress of an elegant home, is waited on by slaves, moves among hangings of silk, on the softest of Moorish rugs; her eyelids are painted with kohl, her finger nails with henna; her harem opens on a courtyard pervaded by the odoriferous scent of the mandragora and the blossom of the orange, cooled by the splash and

play of fountains, and animated by storks, who are sacred birds in Morocco as elsewhere. Mother and son have by this time unbosomed themselves to each other, and both are confident that the culmination of things will be equal to their expectations.

Once more Omeyya is alone in the dead of voiceless night, under cloud-obscured stars. He has been waiting since before the sun had withdrawn his last beam from the picturesque panorama afforded by the sight of the Western Mecca and its wreath of groves and gardens, spreading on the slopes of the valley through which flows the Wad-el-Jubar. Omeyya stood on the height crowned by Mulai Ismael's bastion, whence the view of Fez is as perfect as that of the palace grounds. As night closed over the city and the green tops of Mulai Edris—the famous mosque, striking because of its all-overtopping golden globe,—faded in deepening twilight, Omeyya heard the nightingale at her best, and his soul was well attuned for the amorous cadence. Now the crescent soared in relief on heaven's mystic tapestry, but a later hour was to evolve the

"There sprung, like Iris from the clouds, a smiling Hebe."
Page 323.

vision of Egypt's mystery. At the right moment the potency of Omeyya's rod raised up the bird. Over court and palace broke a white radiance, and in its core hung the heron on wing in mid-heaven.

"Bird of Osiris, worship of Heliopolis! by the invisible masters who fashioned thee I demand to let me behold her whom destiny has decreed to be my consort."

Omeyya was frightened on seeing the phœnix fade, as if offended by his command; but in its stead there sprung, like Iris from the clouds, a smiling Hebe; back of her rose in imperial majesty Muley Zidan and his foremost Sultana.—"*Hamdillah!*" cried Omeyya, falling on his face to praise Allah "the most merciful, the King of the Day of Judgment!" When he rose there were the stars above him and the silvery crescent, while the valley of the River of Pearls rang with the trill of a thousand nightingales.

Thē next morning the streets of Fez were filled with the cries of the Sultan's heralds, calling on him, who was entitled to the great prize, to come forth and obtain it.—"Bring the

crown and obtain thy reward!" was the cry heard in street and bazaar, no one knowing what it meant.

But Omeyya suspected that something had happened in the palace, and he felt that his triumph was assured. What he learned later was this. That same night the *Shereef*, the *Shereefa*, and their daughter Rehamina, had a vision which they imparted to each other the following morning. They had all seen the same thing, and the coincidence could only be explained in one way. Abd-al-Melek's crown had been found. The Sultan's criers were sent out to assure the happy finder of his prize. Thus doubly reassured, Omeyya presented himself before the Emil-al-Mumemin who, it need hardly be told, was greatly impressed by the student's tale.

"What thou hast seen, son, is not the phœnix of Osiris, but the image of Allah's dazzling cock, who each morning chants to delight the ear of the true God, when all the fowls of his kind join in his melodious praise. By no less a miracle than the help of the bird, whom our Prophet saw in the skies, could the

crown of Abd-al-Melek be restored," concluded the Seedna, piously.

In the presence of the great *Divan*, Omeyya produced the crown; and here in the throne-hall his betrothal to Rehamina was solemnly confirmed. In due time there was a royal wedding, after which Muley Zidan found Omeyya not only to be worthy of his lovely daughter, but of his highest esteem and fullest confidence as the wisest counselor in his *Divan*.

A NIGHT BY THE DEAD SEA.

A NIGHT BY THE DEAD SEA.

OTHMAN IBN SAAD was for many years a name for which that of *Eblis* was substituted because of his dare-devil exploits in highway robbery, which prompted the Ottoman Government to set a price on his head. The chief of Kerak was especially interested in Othman's capture, offering to double the reward, but no claimant appeared on the scene; while every week added new outrages to the long list of the brigand's incredible perpetrations. Again and again had the armed men been on the track of the dreaded *Eblis* only to discover too late, after a hot but fruitless chase, that the object of their hunt had posed the while as their informer, guide, or delightful boon-companion, filling their ears with tales

of the blood-curdling atrocities of the robber.

Othman had the means of personating Greek, Turk, Jew, Armenian,—any officer, dervish, saint, beggar, foreign gentleman—yes, or woman; and even resorted to the guise of the devil, wherefore his sobriquet of *Eblis*. It was the study of his life, and he plied his trade with surprising dexterity and hardihood. Tall, wiry, of tawny complexion, flashing eye, an iron grip, black hair, short beard, easy manner, and ostentatiously scrupulous in matters appertaining to the mosque, it never occurred to those who had met him in friendly intercourse, that his hands reeked with the blood of murder committed with the least possible compunction.

What puzzled the authorities was the contradictory descriptions given of the bandit by such as had the good fortune, having met with him, to escape his murderous rapacity; and as well the unaccountable coincidence of his having shed blood at two distant spots at the same hour. This was a point in favor of the popular conclusion that the terrible highway-

man was an incarnation of the devil, who held court in some dismal recess on the shores of the Dead Sea, a fit abode for the dark designs of Satan. The inference was further strengthened by the fact that Othman's crimes were invariably associated with the gloomiest nights in the valley of the Jordan, that he dealt with Moslem and infidel alike without a shade of partiality, and treated his victims with fiendish malice.

The pseudo *Eblis*, however, in reality rejoiced in the comforts of a snug home in the Plain of Engedi, where a small hamlet finds sustenance in the scanty vegetation of the cheerless oasis, hemmed in by the bleakest of wildernesses made up of mountains which look as though they have passed through fire,—of pestiferous marshes, rugged cliffs, deep gorges, a rocky beach, or little vales covered with saline incrustations, all forming the frame to the most depressed and deadest of seas on the face of the earth. The region is sufficiently bleak, miasmatic and impregnated with sulphur to have suggested to Milton his infernal "sights of woe, regions of sorrow, doleful shades,

where peace and rest can never dwell, hope never comes that comes to all."

Othman's plain habitation was kept neat by a devoted wife, and enlivened by an affectionate son, Yezed, a boy in the early twenties, who fed on the Koran's revelations imparted to him, with traditional embellishments, by the *muezzin* of the small mosque, the only public building of the settlement. With an eye to business, Othman had established his headquarters here, but extended his operations as far as his fleet horse could carry him during the darker hours, on pathways known to him alone.

A cultivated patch of grain and vegetables, a cow, a few sheep and a couple of asses, were supposed to supply the necessaries of Othman's household. There was little about the robber's life to stir the envy of his neighbors, excep this fiery steed *El Barak*, so named in allusion to the lightning speed of the Prophet's horse that carried him from heaven to heaven, up to the throne of Allah. El Barak was a lamb in the hands of his master or Yezed, but a terror to strangers whose ap-

proaches the brute resented with a ferocious fury. That the horse had been taught to dash against people and trample them down nobody suspected.

Othman was the most pleasant of neighbors, bothered himself about nobody's business, and was counted among the most harmless of the villagers, deriving a small revenue from his ability to act as guide to such as were curious to explore the mysteries of the desolation around the Dead Sea. This was the plausible reason for the keeping of El Barak.

But the time had arrived when the secret could no longer be withheld from Yezed. The son had to be familiarized with his father's business, and the mettle of the lad had to undergo a test. Was he worthy of his sire? Yezed knew whole surahs of the Koran by heart, and delighted his mother's ear with their recitation. The youth was a dreamer, the muezzin having stocked his memory with the most fabulous of Islam's traditions. Othman did not like his son's visionary spirit, but there was hope in Yezed's great fondness for horses and his expressed wish to own one of

El Barak's temper. His wish was gratified. A powerful courser was Yezed's pleasant surprise on his twenty-first birthday, and the Arabs of Engedi began to suspect that Othman was a much richer man than he appeared. In a few weeks Yezed bestrode his horse like the experienced horseman he in fact already was, and was asked by his father to accompany him to a place he intended to visit the coming evening. A dervish had passed through the village during the day and had casually told the people that a party of foreigners would pass some miles south of Engedi, their object being to see Jebel Usdum, a towering ridge of rock-salt extending many miles, its crystalline crest sparkling like diamonds in the beam of tropical sunshine, and looking fantastically weird in the face of the moon. Othman was alert to the opportunity, and the departing sun threw its mellow ray on two riders, who had just issued from Engedi. They soon left the fertile stretch behind them and advanced between the lifeless tide of the melancholy sea on one side and the barren, dreary range of cliffs on the other.

The ebbing daylight gave the sterile outlook an air of inexpressible gloom, a leaden haze having gathered on the sea which looked more like a vast basin of stagnant oil than water with not a stir of life to break the deadly silence except the hoof-beat of the horses. Othman, who thus far had not uttered a word, suddenly stopped his horse, threw a side glance at Yezed who likewise drew in his reins, so that the horsemen faced each other. Yezed's imagination had been enkindled by the sight of the sinking orb; he thought of the unfading glories of *Jannat al Naïm*, the Prophet's Garden of Delight.

"Yezed, I am thinking that thou hast passed thy twenty-first year and art as helpless as a child; thou hast no ambition, not a wish to fire thee to a manly deed. If I died this coming night what would become of thee and thy mother?" began Othman, eying the unsophisticated youth sharply.

"Yezed wished to own a horse, his father made him happy,—what else shall Yezed wish? If one is happy he has no wish. Thou die to-night? Why should it come to pass?

But even while thou art alive Yezed is willing to work for his mother and his father, who should live for pleasure and for prayer," answered the son contentedly.

"Ah, Yezed knows too little of this world, has no desire to be rich and strong, that is why he has no other wish. What joy is it to spend one's days in such a waste as this?" cried Othman, disappointed at his son's indifference to things for which he had no use. "Does not this region look like a place good for the dead?"

"Yes, good to remind the wicked of their doom and the just of their reward. What of that? Are we not happy even in this unfriendly valley? Not where we live but *how* —is not this the sum of Islam? The joys of mortal flesh what are they when put in contrast with felicities not to be expressed in words?" asked Yezed.

"If Allah meant us not to enjoy this world, why are there so many good things which the weak and the poor cannot have?" was Othman's question.

"Let Allah in his wisdom answer that; we

must be content and resigned wherever we be, whatever our lot, lest we forfeit eternal bliss," replied Yezed piously.

"Thou art soaring above the gate of *Jannat al Naïm*," said Othman ironically. "Who has been there to assure us that it is more than a fable?"

"God has revealed the truth to Mohammed, and he to his followers, and we have it from them; and as the sun is bright, the moon is blessed, and the stars are the work of Allah, so is the Koran His word, and the Prophet His messenger, and *Jannat al Naïm* the paradise of the faithful, and *Jehennam* one of the seven divisions of hell wherein the wicked curse the day of their birth," affirmed Yezed emphatically, and stormed Othman's ear by a rhapsody on the blessedness of the prophet's paradise.

"Those who shall pass the bridge *al Sirat*,—a span thrown over the midst of hell, finer than a hair and sharper than the edge of a razor, beset on each side with briars and hooked thorns,—will, refreshed from the cistern of Mohammed, enter the abode of bliss never to

leave it again. *Jannat al Naïm* is under the throne of God; its earth is as fine as wheat flour, as odoriferous as musk, and shines like saffron; its stones are pearls and jacinths; the walls of its dwellings are of gold, as also are the trees,—all of gold, one of which, called *Tuba*, blooms in the palace of Mohammed, with a branch reaching to the habitation of every true believer. *Tuba* is full to repletion with dates, grapes, and a great variety of other fruits of enormous size, having the taste of anything the blessed who eat may wish to enjoy. Silken garments, magnificent horses ready bridled and caparisoned to ride upon, are there, bursting from the fruits of that pregnant tree, which is so prodigious that the fleetest racer could not pass the entire length of its shade in a hundred years. From the roots of *Tuba* spring all the rivers and springs of paradise,—water, wine, milk and honey affording variety. Seventy-two immortal virgins of ravishing loveliness and free from mortal impurities will receive each faithful in a tent of pearls, jacinths, and emeralds; eighty thousand servants will await his orders; each meal will

be served in dishes of gold by three hundred attendants, each one offering a different dish, and the last morsel being as palatable as the first. Robed in garments of silk and brocade, and crowned with diadems of priceless jewels, the Elect will rejoice in the company of those black-eyed paradisial maidens called houris, on couches interwoven with golden threads standing on silken rugs and set with precious stones. Israfil, the greatest musician of the universe, will lead a chorus of those houris for the enravishment of the faithful, and the trees will make their heavenly bells, of which they are full, ring in response to a sweet breeze wafted from Allah's throne. What, then, do all joys here below amount to?"*

Othman's eyes were riveted on the countenance of the enthusiastic youth, but his mien betrayed not the displeasure of his faithless heart. What could he expect of a lad who raved of fables meant for fools? How divulge to him the secret, which would in an instant shatter all his air castles? And how will it impress him?

* *Cf.* the Koran (Surahs 13, 47 and 55).

"Answer me, son, art thou a coward?" asked the brigand, in a changed voice. "By my troth, thou speakest like a woman, yet art thou sired by a man who defies Eblis."

"What Mohammed taught me and his *imams* that I speak of, father; Yezed is a woman's child, but no woman; nor am I a coward. Set me a task, however hazardous, it shall be done," returned the youth, in a tone of challenge.

"That is my son's true self," resumed Othman, pleased with Yezed's outburst of manly temper. "There is a task for thee to do this coming night, and it is not one for a craven to meddle with. Son, this world is made up of masters and of slaves; the few command, the multitudes obey. That Yezed take rank among the masters is his father's wish; wilt thou be guided by his advice?"

"Whatever Othman Ibn Saad tells his Yezed to do, that he will do," replied Yezed.

"Will he face danger without shrinking?" was the searching question of the father.

"If the deed is in accord with Moslem duty," returned the son.

"Is there any wrong in slaying those who hate us,—those we hate,—those Mohammed hated?" continued Othman, insinuatingly.

"No; whomever the Prophet hated no Mussulman can love. Yes, it was his will that infidels be converted by the sword, if it must be. To shed blood is fearful, however, except it be he whose flesh ought to be torn by the fiends and bitten by the serpents of *al Hawiyat*, there being no deeper place in hell. Yes, him I would this moment stab to the heart, and cast his carcass to the dogs," cried Yezed, in a voice which boded no good for the object of his detestation.

"And who is *he* thou art speaking of," inquired the father, delighted with the anger of his righteous offspring. "He must be indeed wicked whom Yezed hates."

"I am speaking of him whose black deeds are matched by his black name, Eblis, the highway murderer of men and women, ripe for Monkir's club, and eternal perdition," asseverated Yezed, with flashing eyes and clenched fists.

In speechless consternation the eyes of the

older rested on the younger man. He, who had ruthlessly driven cold steel through the heart of many a victim, felt a chill of horror run through his veins at the deathful hatred he had thus engendered in the unsuspicious soul of his own child. Othman twisted the head of El Barak toward the last glow of the western heaven, looked thither for a moment, as though lost in wonder, then, turning round all composed, said in an undertone: "Why, Yezed, that is the very man we are to intercept this night. A great price has been set on his head, and my information makes it certain that we will be in a position to waylay him, if we use our time and arms well. This is the task I referred to. Is Yezed prepared to share his father's daring exploit?"

"Yezed will follow whithersoever his father leads him, and face death in the name of Allah; there is no craven blood in Othman's faithful son," answered the youth.

"Thou art the lion's whelp," closed Othman, and spurred his horse to ascend a gorge which in the rainy season gives passage to a mountain torrent down to the dead water, but

which was perfectly dry now. The path followed by El Barak with ease was narrow, steep and neck-breaking, a yawning gulf suggesting dreadful possibilities to the right, while to the left rose masses of blackened rock, overshadowing the horsemen by hanging projections which threatened to fall with terrific effect.

After a ride of about an hour through deepening twilight, Othman turned into a narrow break of the mountain, shot out of his saddle, bade his horse wait, and told Yedez to do as he did. The youth obeyed without a word, and followed his father who, nimble as a cat, began to climb up an almost perpendicular wall to a considerable height, and slipped into a hole scarcely big enough for an average human body to pass through without difficulty. Once within, Othman put his head out to encourage Yezed who, unfamiliar with the footholds so well known to his guide, despaired of performing a feat perilous even for an acrobat to attempt. Down came the end of a rope for Yezed to take hold of. It was dense night when the form of the lad disappeared in the interior of the rocky nest.

There was already a light, and Yezed was struck with wonder at the spacious hollow before him. High and dry and clean, it was irregular in shape, sloping down toward a narrowing deep which startled the imagination of the youth. Who could tell the mystery of that black pit which seemed to breathe like the mouth of a sleeping giant? Yes, a gentle breeze proceeded from the mountain's heart, saturated with a something that made Yezed feel uneasy.

Other surprises diverted Yezed's attention. What looked like a niche a few feet above their heads, was soon reached by stepping on a loose bowlder, and the young man's wonderment was not small to see in the light of a lantern in his father's hand, a wardrobe of various costumes, masks, bearded and unbearded, jack-boots, many uniforms, and a regular armory of weapons and ammunition. That was not all. Several leather bags were brought to light from under a tiger skin, and Yezed's eyes dilated at the precious contents of each and all, as Othman opened them as a surprise for his true-hearted offspring. Costly

watches, costlier jewels, rings, bracelets, necklaces, strings of pearls, taken from murdered women; breastpins of every description, gold and silver money, made up a treasure to feed the avarice of a nabob. "If Yezed asks whose is all this? I will answer it is all Yezed's," said huskily the brigand.

He scarcely breathed the few words when a puff from the black hole put out the light, followed by a moan, a deep sigh and a light rumbling. Othman held his breath. Yezed heard nothing more, but his pulse throbbed nervously. What could he say? He had portentous feelings but no thoughts; it all seemed like a dream.

The light was again burning. "It is all right," said Othman, reassured, and nothing further happened to confirm his suspicion that something had been astir in the unexplored deep. "The one who shall attempt to get the fruit of my life must have the nerve to perish in the attempt. Now, to business, Yezed. Here are this suit and mask for thee, and this thy armor. My panoply is here; don't be disturbed; the devil must match the

devil. Hurry, the minutes count; the game will not wait for us." Saying this, Othman amazed his son by transforming himself into the blackest demon the youth had ever dreamt of in fancy. The veritable Eblis could not look more deterring than the desperado in his black mask with red eyes, red mouth, long, hooked nose, a pointed beard, pointed shoes and tight leg coverings in one garment, a coat ending in a cow's tail, black gloves which doubled the length of his fingers, and a red spear with many points completed the equipment.

"Thou art too slow, son, for an expedition which requires haste not less than courage," said the robber, and actually pushed the youth into a strange garb, adjusted his mask, and threw a belt with pistols around his waist. "Ready!" was the signal, and Othman burst forth from the wall like a bomb from the mouth of a gun fired from the embrasure of a fort. Yezed would not stay behind and found it much easier to get down than up the steep.

Othman was now the real Eblis and his impetuosity seemed to wing El Barak. Fear and

pride spurred Yezed to keep pace with his father. It was one of those nights when the moon is late in rising, and the outlines of the robber as a devil astride of a fiery courser filled his child with horror. Through night and desolation they sped onward, the father leading, the son close behind, with not a sound to vary the awful monotony. They had covered several miles when Othman's experienced ear informed him that his game was near at hand. He discerned the petrified figure of Lot's wife, a pillar of salt forty feet high, and distinctly heard the tramp of the approaching travellers.

"Thy first chance, Yezed, to show thyself a hero or a dastard. Here we leave our horses; thou wilt plant thyself in the way of the beasts; I will strike like thunder; if it prove too much for me, stab and fire; if I hold to, fight; if I give it up, run. I fall on them with the cry of Eblis! Having finished them, our horses will carry us home before the moon is out," whispered the bandit, thrilling with excitement.

For the first time in his experience did Yezed

eel the fighting lust of his sire who was burning for the deadly encounter. If they succeeded in capturing or slaying the scourge of the Jordan's plain, their names would be on everybody's lips, including the Caliph of Estamboul. A lantern in the hand of a horseman afforded a clear view of the travelling company, made up of an armed escort of two civilians, having between them a foreigner on horseback, accompanied by an armed servant. With a yell that made the air shudder, Othman fell on the group, unhorsing one and striking the other with the ferocity of a savage brute. But the brigand was caught in a snare laid for his ruin. It was the Chief of Kerak who had conceived the idea of entrapping "Eblis" by spreading the rumor of the impending arrival of a travelling company in the quarter where they had good reasons to expect his attack. Three athletic Arabs stood by their Chief, but Othman was not a bird to be caught and carried off. His red spear held them at bay, but it was not possible for him to escape. He fired, was fired at, bled from many wounds, but fought like a wounded

bear, the Arabs closing around him. "Give it to them," he cried in desperation. In answer several shots struck the struggling group from a distance. Three of the five fell never to rise; Othman was one of the three, stretched lifeless by a bullet from the weapon of his Yezed. The son had killed his father, and realizing the nature of the tragedy and the peril of his situation, he made a rush for his horse, and vanished in the darkness of night, with none to give him chase.

Whither flee? In his present apparel he durst not seek his home, even if he had better news to bring than the slaughter of his father by his own hand. To get his clothing he must retrace his way to that frightful hole in the rock which he had gladly left in the earlier hour of the night. He dreaded the thought of it, but it had to be; the problem being how to find the way thither?

It was fortunate for Yezed that, in his precipitous flight, he had mounted El Barak in mistake for his own horse, and the sagacious animal carried him instinctively to the right spot, halting beneath the entrance of the hol-

low to which his dead master had ascended so often, especially after successful robberies. "Allah akbar," sighed poor Yezed, as he got out of his saddle and prepared to reach the black nest. There was the rope inviting him to ascend. It was a horrible nightmare. So much had happened in a few short hours! Could anything worse befall him? Come what might, that hollow must be entered. He drew himself up, entered the cave, struck a light, threw off his disguise, put on his plain garments, fell on his face and wept bitterly. The pelf and the jewels will they revive his father who had fallen by his hand?—The pelf and the jewels—horrid thought! It flashed upon his mind like an inspiration.—Great Allah! Eblis—his father was himself that terrible impersonation,—a murderer! How could he doubt it? Did not everything point to the reality of that fact? "Allah akbar. Yezed is the most miserable of sons," murmured the unhappy youth.

But hark! Yes, there was a sigh,—and another,—and a groan, and now a hoot,—and then a howl ascending from that unfathomed black

mouth of the hollow, which stared at him like the vicious eye of a Cyclops. The blood froze in his veins. Once more a puff of wind, as of a whiff from a monstrous gullet, left him in rayless darkness. But more appalling than the dense obscurity was the faint glimmer of a hazy shimmer which stole up from the deep, a phosphorescent illumining of the sepulchral gloom, just bright enough to make the shades visible. Terror drove Yezed to the verge of madness. Might not at any moment some apparition break out upon him through that animated gap? Seizing a loaded gun near by, Yezed emptied its contents into the outlet. The instantaneous response was a terrific burst of the mountain, which sent Yezed wheeling through the air with fragments of rock as great as pyramids. That he was not crushed was not so much a wonder as that he landed on top of a mountainous pile unhurt. New events threw previous happenings into the shade.

By this time it took a great deal to astonish Yezed, but his position of vantage placed under his survey a somewhat dim panorama,

more beautiful than anything he had ever hoped to see this side of *Jannat al Naïm*. Through the shifting mists of an uncertain gloom the eye swept over a plain of tropic luxuriance on the shore of a lake as placid and limpid as the purest azure. As though ignited by a flash of lightning, sprang a blaze from lamps without number, giving distinctness to rich and noble forms of vegetation, studded here and there by fruit-bearing trees thick with blossom, or loaded with those Hesperian apples which rival sunshine in glow. From the shades of a majestic grove flowed the ineffable notes of the bulbul. Fragrant bowers stood decked with the vine's exuberant foliage and cumbered with the clusters that produce the golden juice. Sparkling fountains played in the light of the mystic illumination. A lofty arcade, mocking the rainbow by a myriad multicolored lights, glowed like a curved horizon, covering a great stretch of green meadow, and making day for the fish, which swarmed in the transparent water. Underneath the arcaded bow was room enough for armies to pass each other, or to parade in military array.

Indeed the cymbal, fife and timbrel were heard, and a vast multitude of a strange race overflowed the entire plain, moving toward the arcade as the centre of attraction. It was a half-naked mass of brutified humanity, wild and salacious, the sexes intermingling with revolting indecency. At their head strode a ferocious biped, his hair long, straight and matted, his eyes bloodshot, his visage tattooed, his lips dyed,—chin, teeth and cheek-bones of the gorilla, and limbs sinewy like the buffalo's. In his grasp swayed a huge club; his breast was covered by a shield, his shins by plates of bronze, and he remained no secret to Yezed the moment his beastly cry was heard.

"Hear Nimrod the Huntsman speak, children of Sodom! The mighty sons of Anak and those of the Rephaim, the sky-born, are coming to help us build the tower yonder in defiance of Him who has drowned our sires because of their having lived as we do, and because of their refusing to worship Him as thralls. We shall build higher than His mountains, and then scorn His rage. Yes, we shall

climb above His clouds, laugh at His floods, and storm His heaven. Who is He to be feared? He seized the power, the winds and the thunderbolt, and treats beings like Himself with cruel outrage."

The dehumanized masses yelled, leaped, made horrid faces, distorted their bodies, swore blasphemously, and supplemented their blasphemies by such abominable excesses as caused Yezed to turn away his eyes in disgust. Bestial females rivaled with one another in winning their male brutes by intoxicating drinks, which they made them swallow in great quantities, drinking themselves until they reeled with inebriation. Wild dancing and lewd gesticulations were the prelude to the indulgence of nameless vices, and this was the opening of a Saturnalia of lust and riot.

"The Anakim, the Rephaim, make room for the heroes!" thundered Nimrod the Huntsman. Hereupon the Sodomites divided into two parallel lines, leaving a road free to the triumphal arcade, which burned like a vault of fire. Issuing from a shaded avenue, an

army of hideous giants, swollen with vanity and bristling with arms of every description, advanced in two separate columns toward the blazing arcade where they were to be received and regaled. Their powerful chests were shielded by plates of bronze; so were their knees and down the shins. They wore hides of beasts, the chief one a lion's skin. As they came in sight of the immense vault their chief caused them to break up and pass through a series of evolutions to the vociferous acclaim of the drunken multitude. Nimrod was at hand to extend Sodom's welcome to the warriors.

"Thou mighty leader of the invincible sons of giants, who durst storm heaven to dethrone Him who revels in outrage, we welcome thee and thine, we, the Sodomites, who welcome none, except it be to mutilate or slay the fools who trust our honor. For know, O chief, that in our midst the stranger gets stones to feed his hunger, mud to quench his thirst, and a bed to sleep on, which must fit his length; if he be too long we cut his limbs; if he be too short we stretch them to suit our measure.

Force is our law, valor our God, plunder our business, and license our pleasure. What He above loves we hate, and what He hates we love. We injure the innocent, respect no woman's virtue, roast the brute alive that He may fume and fret, who is our common foe, our tyrant. That you might join us in the work of raising that tower to a height far above His clouds we called you hither. Let Him send another deluge to drown us,—we shall defy His hereafter as we did hitherto, and make His clouds break against the top of that pile. But whatever work be ours to do, let this hour be given to feasting and pleasure. drinking, dancing and loving."

What Yezed heard next was a myriad shriek of terror. As if the lake had been a caldron of oil, its volume rose in a tremendous flame, heaving toward the clouds, and in its conflagration the shores were soon involved. A general upheaval of rock, brought about by an impelling force from below, in its recoil dropped the bed of the lake deep under its shores, creating a gulf buried in fire. Streams of the consuming element shot up from a hun-

dred cracks, crevices and chasms opened by the disturbance, wiping out whatever had life and breath. Swallowed by the fiery billows were the licentious revellers, no vestige remaining to tell of the illumined Eden, which but a few minutes before had been a scene of unspeakable depravity. The whole dissolved itself into a black smoke, pregnant with deathful odors, like the fetid exhalation that hung over the catastrophe of Sodom and Gomorrah. Yezed alone escaped, and his trembling heart recognized Allah's justice and mercy. On every side sulphurous damps, thick night and the silence of death enclosed him.

Where was he? How shall he ever get down from the towering pile upon which he had been dropped by some mysterious power? What will there be around him when day shall rise on the devastation? Ah,—if it all were but a nightmare, including his father's death in the guise of the devil? But the night seemed endless, as though day would never come again, and the position was one of horrid suspense and miserable discomfort. To cap the climax of Yezed's unparalleled mis-

haps, there soared before him the bleeding figure of his father in the attire of Eblis, just as he had seen him hurry to his doom. "Thy hands are clean, O, my son! but I am doomed to swim forever in a pool of blood, the life-stream of the hearts I pierced!" came wailing to his ears upon the passing breeze as the apparition faded from his vision, chilling the boy to the centre of his being.

Yezed attempted to speak, but found his tongue paralyzed; he tried to express himself by signs, but his arms and fingers were lame. Gathering all his strength, he threw his frame in the direction in which he had seen Othman depart, and he struck his head against a stone. How did the stone come here? There had been nothing there before. Yezed rose to his feet; there was no smoke to be seen. He thrust out his arms sideways and struck against a wall. There was no wall before. "Allah, great Allah, is not this the hollow where I changed my clothing!" So it was. Why not make a light? It was made, and, lo! there was the sequestered nest, there the armory and the singular wardrobe, there the

treasure of the dead brigand, and there the fearful black hole which graciously hid those mysteries he had witnessed. Yezed shook with chill. He felt that it was the dead of night, and had overwhelming feelings to control. What remained of the nightmare as an unescapable reality was horrible to dwell upon. Shall he ever return to the infernal hollow again? No, never! never! Why stay one second longer than necessary in the mouth of hell? Trembling and shivering, Yezed crawled out of the accursed cave, lowered himself to the ground, found the noble El Barak awaiting him patiently, threw his arms around the neck of the faithful brute and lamented bitterly. The horse neighed gently, as though he, too, understood his new master's great sorrow.

Seated in the saddle, Yezed allowed the intelligent animal to take its own course, and was shortly before daybreak landed before his mother's habitation. There was weeping and wailing in the widowed house. Yezed decided to divulge the whole truth to his friendly master, the muezzin. The holy man shuddered as he

listened to his pupil's tale, but advised secrecy, lest widow and orphan be thrown into prison as accessories to the numerous crimes of the guilty Othman. He took great care, however, to inform himself about the location of the interesting cave, and was ere long in a position to turn his back upon the humble villagers of Engedi, not without inducing the widow and her son to follow him to a happier place.

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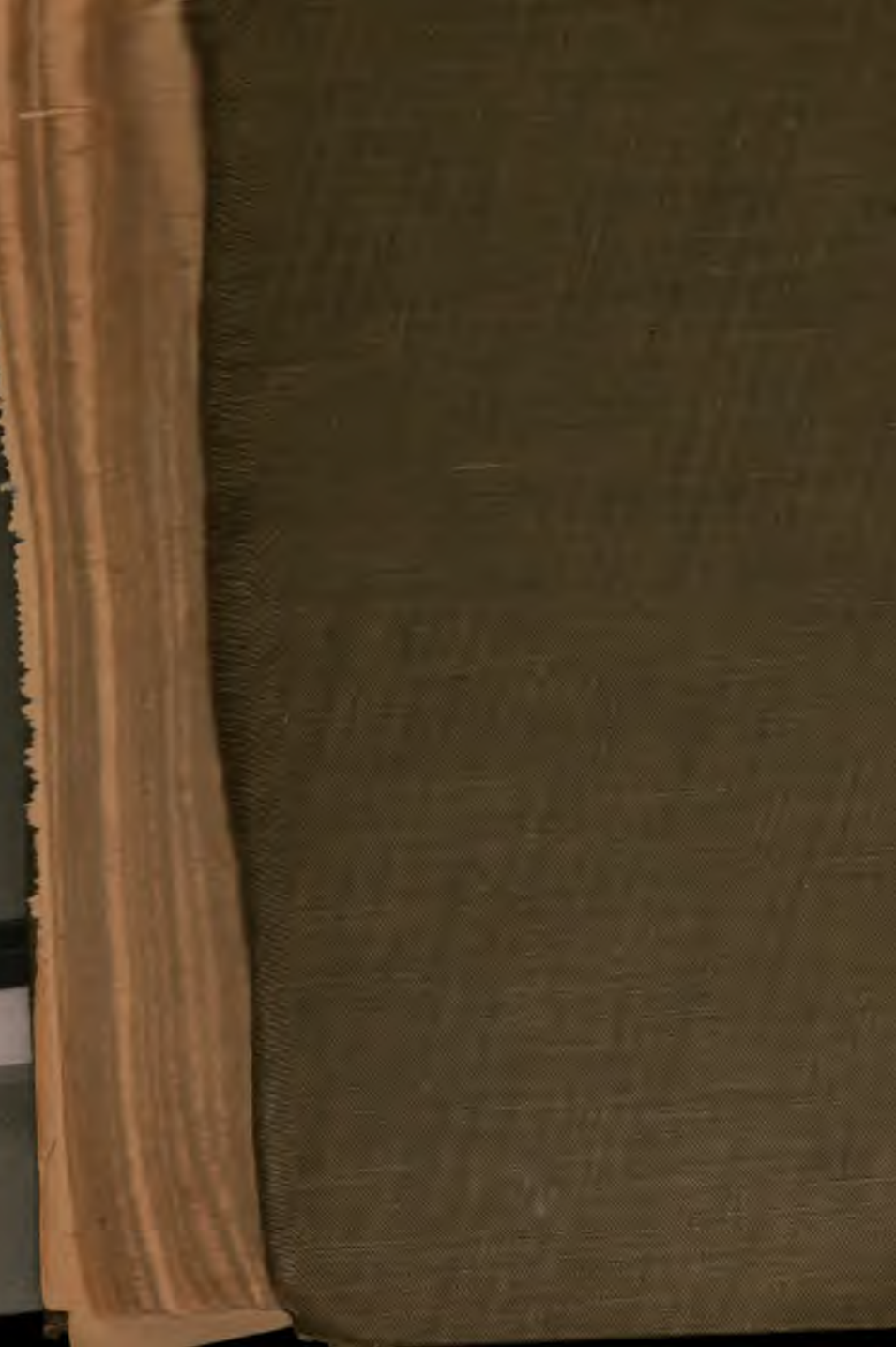
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